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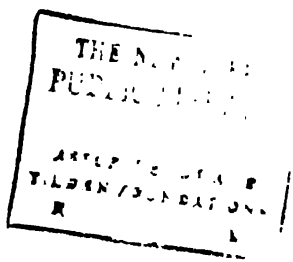


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TO HERAT AND CABUL


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ANGUS AND POTTINGER WATCHING THE FIGHT FROM THE WALLS OF HERAT.

Frontispiece.

TO HERAT AND CABUL

A STORY OF

THE FIRST AFGHAN WAR

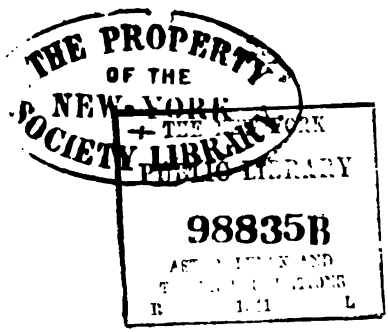
BY

G. A. HENTY

Author of "With Buller in Natal" "At the Point of the Bayonet"
"The Bravest of the Brave" "Won by the Sword" &c.

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLES M. SHELDON

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J.E.



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JF

PREFACE

In the military history of this country there is no darker page than the destruction of a considerable British force in the terrible defiles between Cabul and Jellalabad in January, 1842. Of all the wars in which our troops have taken part never was one entered upon so recklessly or so unjustifiably. The ruler of Afghanistan, Dost Mahomed, was sincerely anxious for our friendship. He was alarmed at the menacing attitude of Russia, which, in conjunction with Persia, was threatening his dominions and intriguing with the princes at Candahar. Our commissioner at Cabul, Mr. Burnes, was convinced of the Ameer's honesty of intention, and protested most strongly against the course taken by the Indian government, who determined upon setting up a discredited prince, who had for many years been a fugitive in India, in place of Dost Mahomed.

In spite of his remonstrances, the war was undertaken. Nothing could have been worse than the arrangements for it, and the troops suffered terribly from thirst and want of transport. However, they reached Cabul with comparatively little fighting. Dost Mahomed fled, and the puppet Shah Soojah was set up in his place; but he was only kept there by British bayonets, and for two years he was so protected. Gradually, however, the British force was withdrawn, until only some five thousand troops remained to support him. Well led, they would have been amply sufficient for the purpose, for though the Afghan tribesmen were dangerous among their mountains, they could not for a moment have

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stood against them in the open field. Unhappily the general was old and infirm, incapable of decision of any kind, and in his imbecile hands the troops, who in October could have met the whole forces of Afghanistan in fight, were kept inactive, while the Afghans pillaged the stores with the provisions for the winter, and insulted and bearded them in every way. Thus a fine body of fighting men were reduced to such depths of discontent and shame that when the unworthy order for retreat before their exulting enemy was given they had lost all confidence in themselves or their officers, and, weakened by hunger and hampered by an enormous train of camp followers, they went as sheep to the slaughter in the trap the Afghans had prepared for them. It would almost seem that their fate was a punishment for the injustice of the war. Misfortunes have befallen our arms, but never one so dark and disgraceful as this. The shame of the disaster was redeemed only by the heroic garrison of Jellalabad, which, although but one-fourth of the strength of that at Cabul, sallied out after a noble defence and routed the army which Dost Mahomed's son Akbar had assembled for their destruction.

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TO HERAT AND CABUL

CHAPTER I

ALONE IN THE WORLD

ON the 20th of September, 1837, a lad was standing before Mr. M'Neill, the British minister at the Persian court. Both looked grave, for the interview was an important one. The former felt that it was the turning-point of his life, the opening of a fresh career, the introduction to a service in which he might gain honourable distinction and credit. To the British minister it was of scarcely less importance, for the interests of Great Britain were gravely involved in the success of the mission that he was now entrusting to this young clerk in the employment of the embassy. It was nothing less than thwarting the designs of Persia, aided and instigated by Russia, to capture Herat and to conquer at least the western portion of Afghanistan, the alliance of the princes of Candahar having already been secured.

Angus Campbell was now about sixteen years old. His father was a trader, who had for twelve years been settled in Tabriz, carrying on business on his own account in some branches of trade, and as agent for a Scotch firm in others. The boy had been left with some relations in Scotland until he was twelve years old, when his parents had paid a short

visit to their friends in Scotland, and had brought him back with them. The change of life was not an agreeable one to him. In the eight years that had elapsed since he had last seen his parents, he had, of course, almost forgotten them, and it would be some time before any real affection for them would spring up. It was the companionship of his school-fellows that he missed rather than that of his aunt, a strict woman, who made no allowance whatever for a boy's restlessness and love of fun, and who was continually shocked by the complaints made by members of her chapel as to the conduct of the boys at Dr. Murray's.

It was the principal school in the little town. The teaching was good, the application of the rod frequent, but neither teaching nor thrashing availed to soften the manners of the healthy and somewhat riotous lads, who once out of school threw themselves with all their hearts into their favourite diversions, among which the most conspicuous were fishing in forbidden parts of the river, bird-nesting in woods which were kept strictly private and guarded by keepers, playing hare-and-hounds across the fields of the crustiest of farmers, and above all engaging in desperate battles with the boys of other schools. In all these pastimes Angus Campbell took as large a share as his age entitled him to, and the state of his clothes and his face when he returned home was a source of continual amazement and irritation to his aunt.

She had even endeavoured to arrange for a deputation to wait upon Dr. Murray with a list of grievances suffered by the townspeople, such as broken windows, the yells and shouts of conflict, and the destruction of the boys' garments caused by the various fights, and to propose that the hours of play should be shortened, and that some sort of supervision should be exercised at all times over the boys. However, although there were many who agreed with her that the present state of things was disgraceful, nothing came

of the movement; for the fathers, remembering their own boyhood, were to a man against the idea.

"We did just the same in our young days," they said, "and are none the worse for it now. Lads cannot be like lassies, and we don't want them to be even if they could; if you were to speak to the doctor, he would just laugh in your faces, and would tell you that he kept a school for boys and not for girls. If you have complaints to make against any of his scholars, make them, and he will punish the lads as they deserve. His boys are no worse than others, and he does not wish to see them better. If they do some mischief occasionally, it is because they are in good health and in good spirits, and a lad of that kind is far more likely to turn out well than one who spends all his spare time in poring over his books."

As the doctor's opinions on these subjects were known to all the town, Miss Campbell's proposal came to nothing. She would herself have gone to him to complain of the doings of her nephew, but there was a strong feeling in the town that while all things connected with the school were under the doctor's charge, parents should take other matters into their own hands, and maintain discipline by the use of the tawse in their own dwellings, and that they had no right to trouble Dr. Murray about private delinquencies.

He had, indeed, sufficient on his hands, for although no actual supervision was maintained when the lads were once dismissed from school, there were bounds set beyond which they were not allowed to go, and when they were caught upon any of their frequent forays beyond these limits, he had to adjudicate and punish the offenders. But it was not often that this happened; for while the boys considered it not only justifiable but meritorious to break bounds, they looked upon anyone caught in the act of showing a want of craft and

of judgment, and so, having good legs and lungs, they were generally able to outdistance their pursuers.

Thus, then, when his parents returned to Scotland they found Angus a healthy, active, and high-spirited boy, somewhat rough in manners, but straightforward and honourable, for it was a tradition in the school that no boy should ever try to screen himself by a lie. When questioned by his father, he acknowledged that he would like to stay at school for a few years longer.

"And I should like you to do so too, Angus; but it is a long, long journey, and a difficult one, from Tabriz to Scotland, and it may be many years before I return home again. It is a journey that it is impossible for a boy to make alone. But this is not the only reason why I wish to take you back. I want to train you to help me in my business, and until you speak Persian fluently you will be of no use whatever to me. At your age you will pick it up rapidly, far more rapidly than you could if you did not begin till you were seventeen or eighteen. We will generally speak to you in Persian, and you will have many opportunities for practising it. In two years you ought to speak it like a native. Arabic will also be very useful to you. I have constant communications with India, with Turkey, and with Herat. I buy goods from all these countries; and sell Persian products to them. In Afghanistan, indeed, Persian is spoken generally by the trading and upper classes; but Arabic is essential to trade with Constantinople and Smyrna, with Bokhara and the Turkomans; and it is our chief medium of communication with India traders, who, although speaking several distinct languages, all have more or less knowledge of Arabic. It has been a great privation to your mother and myself to be so many years without you. We have no other children, and it would be a great joy and comfort to our lives, as

well as a great assistance to me in my business, to have you with me."

"I understand, Father," the boy said; "I did not think of these things before. I am sure I should be very glad to be able to help you, and I won't say another word about being sorry to leave all my friends."

"It is quite natural that you should be sorry, Angus; it would be strange indeed if you were not. However, I don't think you will dislike the life out there when you get accustomed to it. We will certainly do our best to make you happy."

So Angus had returned with them, and soon settled down to his new life. Devoting himself earnestly to acquiring the language, at the end of six months he came to speak it fairly, and before he had been out a year could have passed as a Persian lad; at the same time he had made considerable progress in Arabic. His father had then dressed him in Persian fashion. There was a good deal of ill-feeling among the lower class against foreigners, and the pugnacity that had been fostered in Angus at school had frequent opportunities of displaying itself; for, in spite of good resolutions to the contrary, he was often goaded into fury by the taunts and abuse with which the boys assailed him when he went out alone, and had thrown himself upon them, and used his fists with such effect that he had sometimes put to flight half a dozen lads of his own age. But in Persian costume he could move about the streets unnoticed; and although he did not like the change at first, he acknowledged that it was useful, for his father pointed out to him that it was essential that nothing should take place that could add to the dislike with which foreigners were regarded. Already several angry complaints had been made by neighbours of the state in which their sons had come home after an encounter with him.

Nearly four years after Angus arrived at Tabriz the plague made its appearance in Persia. It spread rapidly, and Tabriz was one of the cities which suffered most severely. One evening Mr. Campbell returned home from a visit to a customer and complained of feeling unwell. The next morning it was too evident that he had caught the infection. Before nightfall his wife also sickened. Twenty-four hours later both were dead. Mr. Campbell had a long talk with his son as soon as the disease manifested itself in the case of his wife.

"Angus," he said, "you must prepare for the worst. The cases of recovery are few indeed. The servants have already fled, and even did I wish you to leave us, I know that it would be too late now. God's will be done, my boy, and I can only hope that you may be spared. However that is in His hands. You have been my assistant now for the past three years, and know how matters stand. I have no debts. The books will show you how much is due to me from the house at home and how much by my agent at Bombay. The stock of goods in the warehouse is worth a considerable sum. I am unable to think very clearly now, or to advise you what to do should you be left alone; but it is clear to me that you are too young yet to manage the business, and it is not likely that the firm would entrust their affairs to a lad of your age. I should say, therefore, that you had best dispose of all the goods; the books will show you their prices. As for yourself, I will give you no advice. It will be open to you to return to England or to go to Bombay, and I have no doubt my agent there will obtain employment for you, especially as you will have money to embark in any business you may go into. But do not invest a penny until you become of age; you will by that time be able to judge wisely whether the business you are in is that in which you can best employ your mind.

"Whatever you do, do not remain in Tabriz. As is always the case in times of plague or famine, there is sedition and trouble, and foreigners become the object of hatred, for the poor people have some sort of superstitious idea that they are responsible for the scourge. The best thing you can do is to consult our Armenian friend, who is also our vice-consul; he will view matters more clearly than I can do at present. Put your trust always in God, my boy. My own opinion is that you had better remain in the East. Your knowledge of languages would be absolutely useless to you at home, and you could only hope to obtain a place in a counting-house."

"I will do as you tell me, father," Angus said, trying to speak steadily. "I will try always to be what you would wish me."

His grief was terrible when his mother expired two or three hours after his father. He roused himself, however, to see to the simple preparations for their funeral, and late that evening buried them in the garden behind the house.

The next day as he was sitting alone he heard a tumult in the street. Looking out, he saw that several houses, which he knew belonged to foreign traders, were in flames, and a mob of maddened men were rushing down the street towards his house. Resistance would have been madness. He ran to the safe, seized the bag containing the cash, and had just time to run out at the back of the house and escape by the gate in the garden when the rioters burst in.

For a few minutes they were engaged in the work of pillage. Shawls from Cashmere, native embroidered silks, costly goods from India, Turkish, Persian, Turkoman, and Heratee carpets, and British goods of all kinds were scrambled and fought for. When the house was sacked from top to bottom it was set on fire, and as a volumne of smoke rose from it, Angus turned away from the spot where from a distance he had been watching the scene, and made his

way to the house of the Armenian merchant. The loss of the house and the contents of the warehouse affected him little—although he knew that it had cost him more than half his inheritance—but this was as nothing to what he had so recently suffered.

The vice-consul had been an intimate friend of the family. On approaching his house Angus stood some distance from the door and called. A servant looked out. "Will you tell Izaac effendi that I desire greatly to speak to him?"

The Armenian quickly came to the door. "My poor lad," he said, "I grieve deeply for you. I heard of your losses, and the news has just been brought in of the burning of the house and magazine. But why do you stand so far away?"

"Because I would not bring contagion near you, effendi. I came to tell you what had happened, and to say that I shall buy some food and go out into the country, and there remain until I die of the plague or can be sure that I have escaped contagion."

"You will come in here at once," the Armenian said. "Does not one in the street run against persons who may be affected. Many of my compatriots have come here to ask my advice, and some of them have stricken friends in their houses. Since I came to reside here I have four times seen the plague raging, and each time it has passed me over. Whether it is the will of God that I should thus be spared I know not, but I am in His hands. Come in, lad, I will take no denial. Shall I desert my friends when they most need comfort and aid? What is my friendship worth if I should, now in your hour of need, turn my back upon you? Come in, I pray you."

Seeing that the old man was thoroughly in earnest, Angus, too greatly touched by his kindness even to speak, silently entered the house.

"I will take you through at once to the pavilion in the garden," the merchant said. "Although I have no fear myself, there are my servants and clerks. 'Tis like enough that some of them may be stricken, for they, like all of us, are liable to be smitten when they go into the streets, and should this be so they might blame me for your presence here; therefore 'tis best that you should for three or four days live in the pavilion; I will bring you out cushions and pillows. But I do not think that you will be attacked; had you taken the plague you would probably have shown symptoms of it ere now. Keep your thoughts from dwelling on it. I will bring you out some books; try to fix your mind on them and abstain as much as possible from dwelling on the past. I will bring your food out to you, and we will talk together to-morrow, there is much that you will have to consider."

"What are you thinking of doing?" his host asked him when he came in to see him on the morning after his arrival.

"I have been trying to think, but I cannot decide on anything. I do not wish to go back to Scotland. I have an aunt living there, but she would not welcome me warmly. Besides, if I were to do so, I do not see how I could earn my living; for my knowledge of Persian and Arabic would be of no use to me. If I had been ten years older the firm for whom my father was agent might have appointed me in his place, but of course I am a great deal too young for that. They acted as his agents also, and bought for him the goods in which he dealt outside their business; and he told me when he was taken suddenly ill that they had about a thousand pounds of his money in their hands. That would be of no use to me now, and I should very much prefer not to touch it until I am old enough to set up in trade."

"The position is certainly a grave one, Angus. I agree with you that it would be better for you on all accounts to

remain out here, at any rate for a time. Your father had correspondents also in Bombay, had he not?"

"Yes, he made purchases of Persian goods for a house there; but he did not do much for them, as the trade is principally in the hands of the Parsees."

"There is one thing that you might do," the Armenian said, after thinking for some time. "I have heard that a Mr. M'Neill is on his way to Teheran as British minister there. You might be able to obtain a post in his Embassy. You can write both Persian and Arabic, and might be useful in many ways. It would not be necessary for you to ask a large salary, but, however small, it might lead the way to better things. At present there is much political disturbance. The Shah is meditating an attack upon Herat, and has already given orders for an army to be collected. Certainly the British government will feel jealous of any movement that would extend the power of Persia farther towards Afghanistan, especially as they are, I hear, about to take steps to interfere in that country by placing a rival of Dost Mahomed on the throne. Then, too, it is no secret that Russia is encouraging the Shah, and it is probable that Russian influence will become predominant in Persia. The conquest of Herat would matter little to England were it by Persia alone, for Persia is powerless to damage India; but with Persia acting as the tool of Russia, which some day or other will assuredly swallow her up, the matter is very much more serious. This being so, there can be little doubt that the new British minister will be charged with a mission to counteract the designs of Russia as much as possible, and might be glad to take into his employment one who knows the language well and could gather news for him in the guise of a native—for there are so many dialects spoken in different parts of the country that any imperfection of speech would pass unnoticed."

"I think that would be an excellent plan, sir, if it could be carried out."

"I will give you a letter stating the circumstances, speaking of the esteem in which your father was held, and vouching for your character. If you decide to take this course, I think it would be well for you to leave at once, for from what I hear of the new minister's course you would then arrive at Teheran within two or three days of his getting there, and might have a better chance, therefore, of obtaining a post in his office. As to the money you speak of, it seems to me that, as your country is a long way off, it would be better if it could be sent to the house with which your father had dealings at Bombay, since there are constantly vessels sailing thither from ports in the Persian Gulf; and whether you saw an opportunity for doing a trade with India, or thought of going there yourself, it would be an advantage to have your money ready to your hand. You must already know a good deal of trade matters, having, as I know, worked as your father's assistant for the past two years. At any rate a year or two at Teheran in the service of the British minister would be an advantage to you in many respects. There is a caravan starting to-morrow, that is why I suggested that you should leave at once. A merchant who travels with it is a friend of mine, and I can recommend you to his care, but it would certainly be best for you to travel as a native."

"I thank you, sir, very heartily, and shall certainly do as you advise me, for as an English lad going alone with a caravan I could scarcely hope to escape trouble with camel-drivers and others. If I fail to obtain employment at the Embassy, I shall probably travel down with a caravan to Bushire, and take ship to Bombay. I have plenty of money to do that, for the expense of travelling with a caravan is very small—nothing is needed except for food—and the pas-

sage in a native craft would not be more than a pound or two. I have nearly two hundred, so that I could live for a long time in Bombay if I failed to obtain employment there. When it is gone, I could at least enlist in one of the British regiments."

"It is a poor trade soldiering, lad, though in your case it might not do you harm for a few years, especially if you turned your attention to learning some of the Indian languages. With such knowledge you should certainly have no difficulty in making your way with the little capital you will receive from home."

And so it was settled, and Angus travelled to Teheran. The journey did him good. He had bought a donkey, and trotting along by the side of the merchant to whom his friend had introduced him, the novelty of the life, the strangeness of passing as a native among the travellers, and the conversation of the Persian merchant kept him from brooding over his sorrows. He felt that, suddenly thrown as he was upon his own resources, and compelled to think and act for himself, when but a fortnight before he had others to think and care for him, he must bear himself like a man. It was only at night, when rolled in a blanket he prepared to sleep, that he gave way and lay for hours weeping over his loss.

The merchant, who had been much pleased with his conversation, and had made many enquiries as to the ways of his countrymen, and to whom he had told his plans, invited Angus to take up his abode with him at a khan until he found whether he could obtain employment at the British minister's. Issuing into the town, after having seen his animals attended to and his goods stowed away, the merchant went to see some friends, and on his return told Angus that the new British minister had arrived two days before. The next morning Angus went to the envoy's, and sent in the

letter with which the Armenian had furnished him, together with the translation which he had made and the vice-consul had signed and stamped. He had not waited many minutes when one of the attendants came to him and led him in to the minister's room.

"You are Mr. Campbell, the young gentleman of whom our vice-consul at Tabriz writes to me?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is a sad story that he has told me, and I would willingly do anything in my power for a young countryman thus left so sadly and suddenly on his own resources in a foreign land. He tells me that you speak Arabic as well as Persian, and have some acquaintance with Armenian colloquially, though you cannot write it as you can the two former languages. Do you know any other language at all?"

"I know some Kurdish. One of my father's porters was a Kurd, and I was able to get on fairly with him."

"He tells me that it is your wish to obtain employment of some sort with me, as at present you are not old enough to enter upon trade for yourself, and that you do not wish to return to Scotland."

"No, sir. I have been away for four years, and were I to go back I should lose the advantage that I have gained in learning these Eastern languages."

"Quite right; very sensibly decided," the minister said. "And I suppose that you know something of trade?"

"Yes, sir, my father took much pains in instructing me, and for the past two years I have acted as his assistant, and have learned the value of most articles of trade."

The minister nodded.

"Very good; it will doubtless be of value to you hereafter. However, I can at present utilize your services here. I have with me my secretary, and I have the dragoman

employed by my predecessor, who speaks half a dozen languages; but in many ways a sharp young fellow like yourself, able if necessary to mix with the people as one of themselves, and to gather me information as to popular opinion, and who can read and write Persian fluently, would be a welcome addition to my staff. Of course I cannot offer you high pay, as I have an allowance for the expenses of my office upon the same scale as that of my predecessor."

"The pay is quite a secondary matter with me, sir. Even if there were no pay, I should be glad to accept a temporary post under you, as it would be a great advantage to me afterwards to have been employed by you, and I should at least have time to decide what to do next."

"I will think the matter over," the minister said; "at any rate there will be a room assigned to you in the house, and for the present thirty shillings a week for your living. You had better continue to wear your Persian attire. Have you European clothes with you?"

"No, sir, everything was burnt."

The next day Angus was installed in a small room next to that of the secretary, and set to work translating Persian proclamations, edicts, and other matters. A fortnight later the minister decided that he should be dressed as a European when in the house, and a tailor was sent for and ordered to make him clothes of the same style as a suit of the secretary's, which was given him to use as a pattern. The minister nodded approvingly when he entered the little office on the day when Angus first wore his new suit. His work was now changed, and while visitors of distinction were ushered in directly to the minister, and others of less importance were first interviewed by the secretary, people coming in with complaints or petitions were shown in to Angus, who took down what they had to say, and then dismissed them to call the next day for an answer. He was

amused at the general impression prevailing among these people that if the British minister could be induced to take up their cases he could obtain justice and redress for them, and how evidently they disbelieved his assurances that a foreign official could not interfere in such matters.

Six months passed, the Shah had started with his army towards Herat, and the evidences that Russia was at the bottom of the movement, and that he was acting in accordance with her advice, became stronger and stronger. Angus stood high in the minister's good opinion, from the steadiness with which he worked, the tact and good temper that he showed with the natives he interviewed, and the willingness with which he would, after the office was closed, work until late at night at his translations. Sometimes he changed his attire again, and slightly darkening his face, and tucking away his light hair, would go out into the streets, mingle with the crowd in busy quarters, and listen to the talk. From the fact that the expedition against Herat was seldom spoken of, he gathered that the war was not popular except among the trading class, who thought that the possession of Herat would lead to a large increase of trade with Afghanistan, and even through Candahar to Northern India. It was, however, but seldom that he went on these expeditions, for it was certain that any private arrangement that had been made between the Shah and Russia would be known only to two of the former's principal officers.

One evening Mr. M'Neill summoned him to his own apartment, and said: "I have obtained information from a source I can rely upon that Russia is encouraging the Shah, and that there are other Russian officers besides their accredited envoy in the Shah's camp. Mr. Corbould started half an hour ago, and will carry the news himself to London; it is too important to be trusted to other hands. I have no doubt whatever that orders will be sent to me at once to mediate

between the parties, and to put a certain amount of pressure upon the Shah. Herat is considered the key of Afghanistan, and although we could do nothing to assist its defenders, even were a force to start at once from Bombay, I fancy that I should be authorized to say to the Shah that England would greatly resent the town being permanently occupied; and that she might even go so far as to blockade the ports on the Persian Gulf, and so put a stop to the whole trade of Persia with India. The great question, of course, is how long Herat can hold out against the Persians. The place has the reputation of being strong, but I hear that the fortifications are much dilapidated. The Afghans are likely to fight well up to a certain point, but they might, and probably would, get disheartened after a time. I am anxious to assure them that if they will but hold out, England will do all in her power to induce the Persians to give up the siege. The messenger I send must at once be altogether trustworthy, must be able to make his way through the country as a native, and must have a sufficient knowledge of Arabic to make himself understood there, although this is less important, as there must be many traders in the town who understand Persian."

"If you would entrust me with the message, sir, I would gladly undertake to carry it to Herat."

"That was my purpose in sending for you, Mr. Campbell. I have the greatest confidence in you, and as your Persian is good enough to pass in Teheran, it is certainly good enough for the country districts. But it is not only because I should trust you thoroughly, and have every faith in your being able to carry out the mission, but also because I thought that it would be of great utility to you to be engaged in the performance of such a mission. If Herat defends itself successfully until relieved either by Afghan troops, or as a result of our diplomacy, it will undoubtedly be a feather in

the cap of the gentleman I select to undertake the commission of encouraging the Heratees to hold out; and, with my report of the valuable services that you have rendered here, might obtain for you a better position in the diplomatic service than I can offer you, or some post in India where your knowledge of Persian and Arabic would be valuable."

"I thank you very much indeed, sir. The change to an active life would not only be very pleasant to me, but I can quite understand that if good comes of it I might benefit greatly. Would you wish me to return as soon as I have delivered your message?"

"No, I think it would be better for you to remain there. I myself will shortly join the Shah in his camp; the office here will be closed."

On the following day Angus started. The back of his head having been shaved, his hair was completely covered by his turban. He wore wide Turkish trousers, a loosely fitting blue embroidered vest, and a long kaftan thickly padded and falling below his knees, a coloured sash, with two long-barrelled pistols, and a curved sword. His attire was that of a Persian trader. He rode on a camel, which, although not a handsome animal to look at, was of good blood and fast. Slung over his shoulder was a long matchlock; he carried behind him a great bale of goods. Accompanying him was a Persian boy, whose father was a doorkeeper at the mission; the boy himself was a hanger-on there. He was a bright-faced lad of some fifteen years old, who ran messages, and made himself generally useful. Between him and Angus a sort of friendship had sprung up, and of an evening when the latter went out he often took the boy with him, his shrewdness and chatter being a relief after a long day's work in the office.

Azim had accepted with delight Angus's proposal that he should accompany him, as his attendant, on a journey that

he was about to make. The matter was settled in a few minutes, a donkey purchased for him, suitable clothes for travel, and a couple of Kurd blankets. Angus himself had a large fur-lined coat reaching to his feet, and four blankets, two of which were of very large size and capable of being made into a tent, for he knew that the khans and the houses in the villages swarmed with insects, and was determined that, unless circumstances prevented it, he would always encamp in the open air. Azim's camel carried, in addition to a bale of goods, two water-skins, a sufficient supply of flour for the journey, a bag of ground coffee, and another of sugar; meat would always be procurable.

It was a long journey, but Angus enjoyed it. The road was a frequented one, for a considerable trade was carried on between Herat and Persia, and traders frequently passed along. Azim turned out a bright and intelligent companion, and no suspicion was anywhere entertained that Angus was aught but what he seemed. Some little surprise, however, was occasionally expressed that he should be making the journey at a time when the Persian army was marching against Herat. To such remarks he always replied that he should probably stay there but a few days, and hoped to be well on the road to Candahar before the army arrived at Herat. He was certain that he should arrive in time, for the army with its huge baggage train had already taken nearly six months in accomplishing a journey that he had performed in little over as many weeks.

CHAPTER II

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

WHEN near the frontier Angus sold the camels. He had already parted with all the goods that he had carried, and he now bought peasant dresses, such as those worn by the Afghan cultivators, for himself and Azim. It was but some seventy miles on to Herat, but the Persian army was on the direct road, having just laid siege to Ghorian, and it was necessary to make a detour to avoid both the plundering parties of the Persians and the Afghan horsemen who would be hovering round the enemy's camp. Before crossing the frontier he purchased sufficient food to last for four days, as it would be dangerous to enter any place where they might be accosted, as their ignorance of the language would seem to prove that they were Persian spies.

Both carried swords and long knives, as a protection rather from the attacks of village dogs than from trouble with men. As it was now November and the weather was becoming cold at night, they were glad of the long coats lined with sheep-skin. The country through which they were passing was fertile, and when on the afternoon of the third day they came in sight of Herat, even Azim was struck with the richness and fertility of the country. It was well watered by several small streams; fortified villages were scattered here and there over the plain. Round these were gardens, orchards, and vineyards, the intervening spaces being in summer covered by wide expanses of corn. As they neared the city they saw that numbers of people from the villages were making their way towards it, many with bullock waggons carrying stores of grain and household

goods, while women and men were alike loaded. They entered the gate of the city unquestioned and unnoticed in the crowd of horse and footmen, cattle, bullock-carts, sheep, and goats.

Striking as was the appearance of the town without, inside everything showed signs of neglect and poverty. Herat contained some forty-five thousand inhabitants; the majority of these were Persian Sheeahs. Once the capital of the great empire of Tamerlane, it had greatly fallen from its former splendour, its decline having been rapid since its capture from the Persians by the Afghans in 1715. It had been retaken by the Persians, and recaptured by the Afghans, under whose savage rule its prosperity had greatly diminished. It was still an important trading centre, being situated on the one great thoroughfare between India and Russia, and being celebrated for the beauty of its carpets and for the temper of its sword-blades. Its trade was principally in the hands of Hindoos, who numbered no fewer than a thousand, some of whom were traders, while others were occupied in the various branches of work to which they had been accustomed in India. There were several families of Armenians and a few Jews.

The city had for years suffered under the horrible tyranny of Shah Kamran, now an old and feeble man, and of his wuzeer or minister, Yar Mahomed Khan, who held the post of governor of the city. Under these men neither life nor property was respected; men and women were seized and sold into slavery under the smallest pretext, often without any attempt whatever to justify the action. Armed bands of ruffians broke into the houses and plundered at their will, and the peaceful portion of the population were in a state of utter misery and despair.

On entering the gate, Angus proceeded along the bazaar, an arched street about a mile long, which extended from

one side of the city to the other. This was crossed at right angles by another bazaar of equal length, and the city, which was built in the form of a square, was thus divided into four quarters. Round the wall was a wide ditch, which was at all times kept full of water from springs rising in the town.

When he had proceeded some distance, Angus heard two traders in one of the shops speaking in Armenian. He at once entered. "Effendi," he said in that language, "I am a stranger here and but newly arrived. Can you tell me where I can procure a lodging?"

The two men looked in surprise at this Afghan peasant who addressed them in their own tongue, and one of them, after a moment's hesitation, bade him come into his private apartment behind the shop.

"Who are you?" he said; "and how come you to speak our language?"

"I learned it in conversation with some of your people in Tabriz, and especially from one who was the British vice-consul there. I also speak Persian and Arabic."

The trader's surprise increased as Angus spoke. "But who are you, then, who have travelled so far, and how is it that having learned so many languages you are now here as a peasant?"

"It is a disguise," Angus said. "My father was a British merchant at Tabriz, and I myself am in the service of the British minister at Teheran, and am the bearer of a letter from him to Shah Kamran."

"You are young indeed, my son, to be engaged on so difficult and dangerous a mission. Surely I can find you a lodging. All trade is at a stand-still now, and we Armenians suffer like the rest. My brother, whom you saw in the shop, is a weaver of carpets; but none will buy carpets now. He has a house larger than his needs, and would, I am sure, gladly take you in."

He called his brother in from the front, and explained to him who this strange visitor was and what he wanted.

"I have money," Angus said, "and am prepared to pay well for my accommodation. I have a servant with me, he is the son of a door-keeper at the embassy, and is altogether faithful and trustworthy. Unfortunately, I do not speak the Afghan tongue."

"That will matter little in the town; the majority of the people still speak Persian, although they may know Pushtoo. It is the same with many of the fugitives who have come in from the plain. You will have difficulty in seeing the prince. He is old and feeble, and for the greater part of his time he is drunk. Everything is therefore in the hands of the wuzeer, who is one of the worst of men—cruel, avaricious, and unscrupulous. We have had many tyrants, but he is the worst; and I can assure you that the success of the Persians would fill all but the Afghan portion of the population with the deepest joy. It will be necessary for you to see him first before you see Shah Kamran. The hour is getting late, and I shall close my shop shortly. If you will go round with my brother to his house I will join you there presently. We all love and respect the English. They have always been our good friends, and glad indeed should we be were they masters here as they are in India; for I have been there, and know how just is their rule—how they oppress no one, and will not suffer others to do so. This would be a happy city indeed if your people were our masters."

A short walk brought Angus and Azim to the house of the carpet-weaver. It was of some size, but bore a neglected and poverty-stricken aspect, which was not belied by its appearance when they entered. The doors stood open, and it could be seen that looms stood idle now in all the rooms. The man led the way upstairs, and unlocking a door there

entered the family apartments. The contrast between these and the floor below was great indeed. Afghan carpets covered the passages and floors, well-stuffed divans ran round the rooms, and although there were no signs of wealth, everything pointed to comfort. The Armenian led them into a room, where his wife and two daughters were seated. They rose in some surprise at seeing him enter accompanied by an Afghan peasant. Azim had remained in the passage without.

"Do not be surprised," the trader said; "this person is not what he looks, but is an English effendi, the bearer of a letter from his minister at Teheran to Shah Kamran. He is going to do us the honour to lodge here for a time. He speaks our language as well as Persian."

"He is welcome," his wife said courteously; "and indeed his presence here will afford us a protection which we shall need more than ever when the passions of the people are excited by the siege."

"As you are accustomed to our ways," the husband said, "you will not be surprised at my bringing you in here or at seeing the women unveiled. As a rule, everywhere in the East we adopt the customs of the country so far that our women veil when they go out, and my wife and daughters would do the same here if they were to walk through the streets. But my daughters have not left the house since they were children; my wife has not done so since we took up our abode here twenty-three years ago."

Angus uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"You would not be astonished if you knew the lawlessness that prevails here. No young woman can venture safely into the streets, for as soon as a report that she was good-looking reached Kamran she would be seized and carried off to his harem even in broad daylight. No respectable woman would think of going out save with an armed escort."

"That is indeed a terrible state of things."

"We are accustomed to it now, effendi, and at any rate we are not molested here. I make a present now and then to Yar Mahomed Khan and also to his principal officer, and I am let alone by them. My brother does the same. They know that I am a carpet-weaver employing eight or ten men, and as they believe I could not be squeezed to any large amount, they are satisfied to let us go on. So as long as we keep quietly at home we are not molested, and we both intend ere long to move from here to Teheran or Tabriz. We have only been waiting until we can manage to get away with our belongings without attracting notice. We have done very well since we came here, for trade has been good. My brother buys up the products of many other looms, and we have both made good profits, but we take care that we do not keep more money than is necessary here. Now I will show you the room that will be at your disposal. You will, I hope, join us at our family meals, so that we shall not have to cook for you separately."

"Certainly, it would be very much more pleasant for me."

The terms were arranged without difficulty, for the Armenian felt that it might be a great protection for them to have an Englishman in the house. The merchant then arranged to obtain a dress for Angus similar to that worn by himself and his brother. This was brought in on the following morning. Having put it on, Angus went out accompanied by Azim. He decided to wait for a day or two before seeing the wuzeer, so as to ascertain the state of things in the town and the preparations for defence. He was going through one of the narrow streets when a loaded camel came along behind him, its paniers nearly touching the houses on each side. Its rider did not give the usual

shout of warning, and Angus had but just time to jump into a doorway when it brushed past him, the Afghan driver grinning maliciously at so nearly upsetting one whom he regarded as a Sheeah trader. A man walking just in front of him, who was not quick enough to get out of the camel's way, was knocked down. As he got up Angus to his astonishment heard him mutter angrily, "Confound you! I wish I had you outside this town, I would give you a lesson you would not forget!" Astonished to find another Englishman here in Afghan costume, Angus stepped up to him and said, "I did not expect to find an Englishman here, sir."

The other turned sharply round. "I am as surprised as you can be, sir! But we had better not be speaking English here. I am lodging within fifty yards of this, if you will follow me I will take you there, and we can then introduce ourselves properly."

In three minutes they were in the room occupied by the stranger. "As host I will introduce myself first," he said with a smile. "My name is Eldred Pottinger; I have been travelling through Afghanistan on an unofficial mission to explore and report on the country to my uncle, Colonel Pottinger, Resident in Scinde. Happening to arrive here at the present crisis, and thinking that I might be useful if the city is besieged, I have declared myself to the wuzeer, and although I still retain my disguise there are many who know that I am an Englishman."

"My name is Angus Campbell, Mr. Pottinger. I am in the employment of the British minister at Teheran, and am the bearer of a letter from him to Shah Kamran encouraging him to maintain the defence of the city as long as possible, and holding out hopes that the British government, which would view the attack upon Herat with grave dissatisfaction, will endeavour to mediate between him and the Shah,

and may even take measures to put pressure upon the latter to withdraw his forces."

"That is very satisfactory. Of course I have had no shadow of authority to speak in that way, and could only assure him generally that he would have the good will of the English, and that as an English officer I would on my own part put any military skill that I possess at his service, and, being myself an artillery officer, might be of considerable assistance to him in the management and working of the guns. But your letter will place me in a more favourable position. What are your instructions? Are you going to return to the embassy or remain here?"

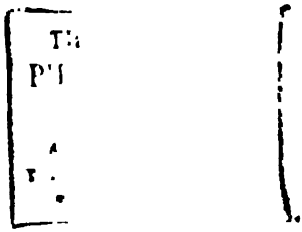
"Mr. M'Neill left it to myself. He will join the Shah's army, as the Russian ambassador is also with it. As he takes the dragoman of the legation down with him, he has no absolute occasion for my services. From what I have seen of the place so far, though I only arrived yesterday, it does not seem to me possible that these mud walls can withstand a battering fire. The place will therefore very likely be taken in a few days; and as I should not care about being in a town sacked by Persian troops, I had intended to leave it as soon as I delivered my letter."

"There is no doubt about the weakness of the place; a European army would carry it in three days. But the Persians have never been remarkable for their courage, while the Afghans are undoubtedly a fighting people. I think it is quite possible that the siege may last for months. You know the dilatory way in which these Eastern people go to work. Of course I can give no opinion whatever as to what would be your best course. It would depend upon so many things—your position at the embassy, your chances of promotion there, and other matters of which I am altogether ignorant. I suppose you speak Persian well?"

"Yes, and also Arabic, and I can get on in Armenian and



A MAN WALKING JUST IN FRONT OF HIM . . . . WAS KNOCKED DOWN.



Kurdish. As to my position, it is scarcely an official one. I am the son of a Scottish trader who for twelve years carried on business at Tabriz. He and my mother were carried off eight months ago by an outbreak of plague, and his house and store were burned in some street riots. I consulted the British vice-consul there, an Armenian who was a friend of my father, and we agreed that from my knowledge of languages I ought to be able to get on better in the East than at home, where it would be of no use to me. I had acted as my father's assistant for the last two years of his life, and had therefore acquired a knowledge of trading; and I have a small capital with which, when I get older, I can either enter into business myself or join someone already established. I was very glad to obtain this place in the embassy as a temporary employment until I could see my way, for although Mr. M'Neill kindly took me on as an extra assistant, of course his successor, whoever he may be, may not want me."

"I think you have done very wisely. How old are you now?"

"I am a few months over sixteen."

"You are young indeed," Pottinger laughed, "to be engaged in political affairs. Well, I should say that if the Afghans really mean to fight, as I believe they will, they can hold the town for some time, and you will therefore be able to learn their language, which would be invaluable to you if you go in for commerce, or in fact whatever you do out here. Things are in a disturbed state in Afghanistan, and I should be surprised if the Indian Government does not interfere there before long; and in that case anyone acquainted with Pushtoo and with Arabic and Persian will have no difficulty in finding employment with the army, and through my uncle I might be able to put you in the way of it. And now about your mission.

"The wuzeer for some reason or other—I own I don't see why—has been exceedingly civil to me. On my arrival I sent to say that I was a stranger and a traveller, and that, should it be pleasing to him, I would wait upon him. He sent down at once to say that he would see me the next day. Of course on occasions of this sort it is usual to make a present. The only thing that I could give him was a brace of detonating pistols. He had never seen any but flint-locks before, and accepted them graciously. Finding that I was a British artillery officer, he at once asked my opinion on a variety of matters, and took me round the walls with him, consulting me as to how they had best be strengthened, and so on.

"I will go up and see him presently, and tell him that you have arrived and are the bearer of a letter from our minister to Shah Kamran. I shall of course mention that you have come in disguise, and that you have therefore been unable to bring the customary presents, and I shall point out to him that you possess the confidence of the British minister. I shall say that for that reason I have persuaded you to remain here during the siege, and that I am sure you will act with me, and moreover will endeavour to keep M'Neill well informed of everything going on here, and will continually urge him to impress upon the British government the importance of the position and the necessity for interfering to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Persians. As to its importance there is no doubt, especially as Russia appears to be making Persia a cat's-paw in the matter. That is why I feel that while fighting for these Heratees—who between ourselves seem to me to be unmitigated ruffians—I am merely fighting for England, for it is of the utmost importance that the gate of India should not be in the hands of Persia, especially if, as you say, Russian influence is dominant at Teheran."

"I am sure I shall be delighted if you will accept me as your assistant, though I don't see at present what possible service I can be."

"You will be of use. There will be no end of things to see about." Then he burst out laughing. "It does seem absurd, doesn't it, that we two, I a young lieutenant and you a lad not yet seventeen, should be proposing to take a prominent part in the defence of a city like this against an army commanded by the Shah of Persia in person."

Angus joined in the laugh. "It is not ridiculous for you," he said, "because as an artillery officer you must know a great deal more about the defence of towns than these Afghans can do; but it certainly is absurd my having anything to do in it."

Pottinger went with Angus to the house of the Armenian in order that he might know where to find him. Leaving him there he went up to the citadel, which stood on rising ground at one corner of the town. He returned in an hour, and said that the wuzeer would receive him at once.

"He is a good deal impressed," he went on, "with the fact that our minister should have sent a messenger here with the letter. At first he did not see why England should be interested in the matter, and I had to explain to him about the Russian intrigue in Persia, and that there was no doubt that sooner or later they would invade India, and that this would be rendered comparatively easy by Herat being in the hands of their friends the Persians. He enquired of me what rank you held. I told him that you were a member of the embassy, acting as assistant-secretary to the minister, and, as was evident by his entrusting you with so important a despatch, were deep in his confidence."

On arriving at the citadel they were at once conducted to the apartment of the wuzeer. Yar Mahomed rose from his

seat and greeted them politely. Angus walked forward, bowed, and delivered his letter.

"You speak Persian, your excellency?" the minister said.

Angus had difficulty in restraining a smile at his new dignity, but said gravely: "Yes, your highness, I speak it and Arabic."

"You journeyed here comfortably, I hope?"

"Yes; there were a few adventures on the way, but not more than I had expected."

Yar Mahomed opened and read the letter.

"You are aware of its contents?" he asked.

"Yes, I learned them by heart before I left Teheran, in case I should be robbed of the letter on the way."

The wuzeer sat in thought for a minute.

"But how," he said doubtfully, "can your country, which is, as I hear, very far distant, exercise any influence with the Shah? Surely you could not send an army all that distance?"

"Not from England, your highness; but we could send a fleet that could shut up all the ports in the Persian Gulf, and we could send troops from India to occupy those places, and so destroy all their trade. Moreover, we could put a stop to all trade passing by land through this town to Scinde, and send a great army by sea and invade Persia, and, as our soldiers are much better than the Persians, might even take Tabriz and Teheran. The Shah knows that they have done great things in India, and will see how they might bring ruin on Persia."

"Yes, what your minister says is true; but will he do this at once?"

"That I cannot say," Angus replied. "At first, no doubt, the government of England would say, 'Herat is very far off; it will fall before we can do anything.' But if they find that it holds out bravely, they will say, 'We must help these

people who are fighting so well.' There is another thing. It is said that there are already some Russian officers with the Shah's army. The English are very jealous of the Russians, and when they come to understand that it is Russia who has sent the Shah to capture Herat their anger will speedily be roused, and they will bid their minister say to the Shah, 'If you continue to fight against Herat, we shall send our ships and our army against you.' The Shah knows that we have conquered in India people far more warlike than the Persians, and he will say to himself, 'Why should I run the risk of losing my kingdom merely to please the Russians, who are really much more dangerous neighbours than the English?'"

"The words of your excellency are wise," the wuzeer said. "You will see that we shall hold out for months, or even for years if necessary. I can understand now why the British minister has confidence in you though you look so young. How many years has your excellency?"

"I am not yet thirty," Angus said calmly.

The wuzeer looked surprised.

"It is because your face is smooth that you look so young. We Afghans wear our beards; I see that you do not, for even this brave officer, who has come to fight for us, has no hair on his face. He has told me that you will stay here, and assist with your advice."

"So far as I am able to do so, I will; but I am not greatly skilled in such matters. Still, I will assist him so far as I can."

"It is good," the Afghan said.

"It would be better, your highness, that it should not be known that I am an agent of the British minister; though of course you can, if you find it necessary, cheer your soldiers by telling them if they fight bravely and well the British minister will try and mediate between you and the Shah, and

to persuade him to draw off his army. But were the Shah to know that the British minister has an agent here, he would be wroth with him, and might not listen so willingly to his representations. Let it then, I beg you, be supposed that, like Mr. Pottinger, I am but an English traveller, who, chancing to be here, is willing to do all that he can to aid in the defence of the town against the Persians."

"Your words are good; so let it be. Where are you dwelling now?"

"At the house of the Armenian carpet-weaver Kajar. The times being bad, his looms are at a stand-still, and he was glad to let me an apartment."

"He is a good man," the wuzeer said, "a good man and honest, but not rich."

Angus felt that the last words were rather a question than an assertion, and he said:

"Surely no. His rooms are very simple, but they are clean, and if a traveller can but find a clean lodging, he cares not how poor it is."

"Shall you be sending a message to the minister?"

"I shall endeavour to do so by a servant lad I have brought with me. I will tell him that his mind may be at ease, for Herat can hold out."

"The Persians are cowards!" the wuzeer said angrily. "My horsemen have been round them for many days, but they give them no chance. They keep together like a flock of sheep, with their guns and their infantry, instead of riding out bravely to bring in plunder and fight with their enemies when they meet them."

Then turning to Pottinger he went on:

"I have sent out, as you advised me, to cut down all the trees within half a mile of the town, so that the Persians will have no shelter from our guns; and as all the granaries are emptied for miles round, they will have a long way to

go to get food. A number of men are also at work at the place where, as you showed me, the wall was rotten; and others are clearing out the ditch, and making the bank steeper where it has slipped down, so that if they should be so mad as to rush forward and try to cross the moat, they will not be able to climb up."

"That is important, Wuzeer, and still more so is it that the little wall at the foot of the mount of earth that surrounds the city wall should be repaired. That is of the greatest importance. They may manage to fill up the moat and cross it, but as long as the lower wall stands they cannot climb up, even if a breach was made in the main wall."

"I will go round now with you," the wuzeer said, "and we will see where the worst places are."

Angus accompanied them, and found that Pottinger's statement as to the weakness of the fortifications was well founded. From a distance the wall had looked imposing, for it was of considerable height and great thickness, but it was entirely constructed of dried mud, and heavy guns could effect a breach anywhere in the course of a day or two. It was evident that if the place was to hold out, it must depend upon the bravery of its troops and not upon the strength of its walls.

For the next week the work went on incessantly. Every able-bodied man in the town was employed in the repairs of the wall and in cutting down trees, while the work of destroying grain and all kinds of necessaries which could not be brought into the town was performed by the troops. These were all Afghans, were in regular pay, and formed the fighting army of the ruler of Herat. Their discipline was at all times very lax, and the permission to destroy and burn, which naturally included looting everything of value for their own benefit, rendered them even less amenable to discipline than before.

Eldred Pottinger, as far as he could venture, tried to induce the wuzeer to have the work executed in a more regular manner and under strict supervision by officers told off for the purpose, but Yar Mahomed viewed the matter with indifference.

"What does it matter," he said, "whether the soldiers take things or not? It would be all the same to the owners whether they have them, or whether they are destroyed, or fall into the hands of the Persians. In a few days the enemy will be here, and it would be foolish to cause dissatisfaction among the soldiers over a matter of no consequence whatever."

The country, indeed, was now deserted by all its inhabitants. Immense stores of food had been brought into the city, every unoccupied piece of ground between the city walls was crowded with cattle, sheep, and horses, and there was no fear that famine would for a very long period be a serious trouble to the besieged. Eldred Pottinger's time was principally occupied in seeing to the repair of the guns and their carriages. Without any definite rank having been given to him, it was understood that all his orders had the support of the wuzeer, and were to be obeyed as if they came directly from him, and that the young man with him was also an Englishman of some importance, and possessed similar powers.

While Pottinger looked chiefly after the military work performed by the Afghans who had come into the town, Angus superintended that upon which the Sheeahs were engaged. These Persian-speaking people carried out his instructions cheerfully, because they were given in their own language, and were not accompanied by the contemptuous haughtiness and animosity which would have characterized the orders of an Afghan, the hostility between the two great religious sects of Islam being even greater than that entertained by both against the infidel.

Pottinger had now taken up his abode at the house of Kajar, where there were several apartments unoccupied. As he did not speak Armenian, and knew but little Persian, Angus and he arranged to have a mess of their own, engaging a man recommended to them by the Armenian as a good cook. This had been rendered the more necessary, as the trader with whom Angus had first spoken had also moved with his wife to his brother's house.

He had taken this step because he foresaw that as the siege went on the position of the Sheeahs would become more and more unbearable, and that the protection the presence of the two Englishmen could afford would be most valuable. Indeed Kajar, as soon as he saw that Angus had been favourably received by the wuzeer, had himself suggested that Pottinger might also be offered accommodation at his house.

"There need be no further talk of payment, effendi, between us. Your presence here will be of vastly greater importance than any money you could give us. No one can say what will happen here. It is not only our property, but our lives which will be at stake; but with you as inmates here, no one would dare interfere with us, and we all regard the fact that you should almost accidentally have been brought here as a special blessing that has been sent from heaven to us."

The young Englishmen thus strangely thrown together soon became fast friends, and it was pleasant indeed to them to enjoy their evenings together, after each had been engaged during the whole day at the duties they had undertaken. A couple of hours, however, were always spent by them, each in his own room. Pottinger engaged the services of a mollah, or priest of the Sheeah sect, to give him lessons in Persian, while Angus worked at Pushtoo with Kajar, who spoke the Afghan language perfectly.

CHAPTER III

THE SIEGE OF HERAT

ON 22nd of November, a fortnight after Angus arrived at Herat, the Persian army took up its position on the plain to the north-west of the city. The inhabitants crowded the walls to watch the advancing host—the Afghan portion of the population with scowling faces and muttered imprecations, the Sheeahs prudently abstaining from all demonstrations of their feelings, but filled with hopes of deliverance from their tyrants. Pottinger learned that the Afghan horse were going to make a sortie, and he and Angus went together to the north-west angle of the wall.

"A good deal will depend upon this first fight," Pottinger said. "If the Persians easily repulse the assault, it will cause a deep depression among the Afghans. If, on the other hand, the Heratees obtain a fair amount of success, it will so encourage them that they will not fear another time to encounter the enemy, and will fight strongly when the walls are attacked."

In a short time the Afghan horse were seen pouring out of the western gate. There was but small attempt at anything like military order. It was a mob of horsemen; individually splendid riders, and for skirmishing purposes unsurpassed, but, as Pottinger remarked to his companion, quite unfit to stand against a charge of regular cavalry equally endowed with courage. Keeping near the city wall until facing the Persian position, where a regiment of cavalry were hastily mounting, they wheeled round and rode against the enemy with loud shouts. The Persians rode to meet them, but were unable to withstand the impetuosity of the charge, and, amidst the exulting shouts of the Afghans on the wall,

wheeled round and fled in disorder. The Afghans then turning, flung themselves upon a strong body of infantry that was advancing against them in good order. These, however, stood firm, emptying many saddles by a heavy volley they poured in when the Afghans were close, and presenting so steady a line of bayonets that the horsemen recoiled.

As they did so, the Persian artillery opened upon the Afghans, who retired until near the wall, and then dismounted and opened fire with their long matchlocks upon the Persian gunners. Pottinger ran at once to a couple of guns close to where they were standing, and under his directions the Afghans in charge of them at once replied to the Persian guns. A number of the Afghan footmen ran out from the gate on that side, and, joining the dismounted men, kept up a hot fire, while those on the wall also joined in the conflict. As the Persian guns could effect little against the infantry lying in shelter, they were now directed against the wall, causing a rapid dispersal of the peaceable portion of the spectators. The effect of their fire showed at once the rottenness of the fortifications. Although but light guns, they knocked down portions of the parapet, which crumbled as if it had been made of rotten timber. Pottinger shook his head as he and Angus walked along to watch the effect of the fire. "If a six-pound shot can effect such damage as this, it is clear that when they get their siege guns to work a few hours will effect a breach in the wall itself."

On their side the Persians also sent out skirmishers. These pushed forward to a point where they could take the Afghans in flank, and cause them to retire nearer to the walls. The fighting was continued until dark, when the Persians drew off, and the Afghans retired into the city. No material advantage had been gained by either side, but the Heratees were well content with the result. They had shown

themselves superior to the Persian cavalry, and had maintained themselves against the infantry.

The Persians lost no time, and during the night pushed forward and occupied all the gardens and enclosures on the west of the city, and placed a strong force among the ruins of a village there. In the morning they began to advance against the wall. The Afghans sallied out horse and foot; the cavalry, unable to act in such broken ground, moved round, and hanging on the flanks of the Persian camp, continually threatened an attack. The infantry, taking advantage of every wall and bush, maintained a heavy fire upon the enemy. The artillery on both sides opened fire, but at the end of the day neither party had gained any advantage.

The Afghans brought in the heads of several whom they had killed, and a few prisoners. The heads were placed on pikes and exhibited on the walls. The prisoners were bartered as slaves in exchange for horses to the Turkomans, of whom a considerable party were encamped at a short distance from the walls.

"It is horrible and disgusting," Pottinger said to his companion that evening as they sat together, "this custom of cutting off heads, but as it is, I believe, universal in the East, it would be worse than useless to protest against it. It is the custom always to reward a soldier for bringing in a head as a proof of his valour, though, in fact, it is no proof, as he may simply, as he advances, cut it from the body of a man shot by someone else. Putting aside the brutality, it operates badly, for instead of following up an advantage hotly, the men stop to collect these miserable trophies, and so give time to an enemy to escape or rally. I have read in the accounts of the campaigns of the Turkish conquerors that the heads were always brought in to the general and piled before his tent, and that each soldier was rewarded according to the number he brought in, and I fancy it was the

same thing with Mohammedan conquerors in India. Well, I am afraid that we shall see a number of things that will disgust us before the siege is over. If I were fighting solely for the Heratees, I should certainly retire if they continue these barbarities. But I have no interest whatever in them; in fact, I see that the greater portion of the population would be benefited by living under the Persian rule. I go into this matter solely because it is one I consider of vital interest to England, and therefore, as an Englishman I am willing to do my utmost to keep, not the Persians, but the Russians from seizing this place."

Angus had now completely caught the enthusiasm of the young artilleryman. He was perhaps less horrified than his companion, for he had seen so much of Eastern modes of punishment, that he had learned to regard them with less horror than that felt by Europeans unaccustomed to Oriental methods.

"I have been accustomed to look on at acts of brutality," he said, "for from the time when I first came out, my father always impressed upon me that we were strangers in this part of the world, and must be very cautious not to show any aversion to its customs. It would lead us into endless trouble if we were to show in any way that what to them seems only natural, was to us revolting; and though I have often been tempted to interfere when I have seen some act of brutality, I have always followed my father's instructions, and walked away without showing any anger or disgust. I agree with you that it is horrid, but it is not like seeing living men tortured; at least, when one is dead it can make no great difference if one is buried with a head or without one."

Pottinger laughed. "That is certainly one way of looking at it, and I can understand that as the custom has prevailed among these peoples for centuries they can scarcely under-

stand our feelings of abhorrence and indignation. However, I am determined that, whatever I do or feel, I will keep my mouth shut, and not say a word that would anger the wuzeer and shake my influence with him. At present he is well disposed towards me, and I have been of real assistance to him. When things become critical I may be of vital service. From what Kajar says there is a strong suspicion that he is not personally brave, which I can quite believe, as very few thorough-paced brutes are. Now old Shah Kamran is, I must own, an exception; an absolutely greater scoundrel than he has proved himself to be probably never existed, but he is known to have been in his earlier days as brave as a lion. If he had been some twenty years younger I should have stronger hopes of eventual success than I have now. Personal bravery in a general is of no extraordinary advantage in a European army, where he is not expected to lead men into battle, but with irregular troops like these Heratees it is of vital importance. They will follow their leader anywhere, but if he sends them into danger while he himself remains at a distance, they lose their enthusiasm directly, and are half thrashed before the battle begins."

"Do you not think that Kamran will be able at any important moment to come forward and show himself among the defenders of the breach? I hear that only a month or so ago he returned from a campaign."

"I am afraid not. I have seen him twice, and although it cannot be said that he is an imbecile. he is next door to it. He understands what is going on, but his nerves are utterly shattered by drink; he is in what may be termed the lachrymose condition of drunkenness. He works himself into a state of childish passion; sometimes he raves, then he whimpers. Certainly his appearance would have no inspiring effect upon these rough Afghan soldiers. They want a man who would rush sword in hand at their head, call upon them to

follow him, and then dash into the middle of the foe, and the miserable old man could scarcely hold a sword in his shaking hand."

"Well, at any rate, the Afghans have fought bravely yesterday and to-day."

"Excellently; but it is the work they are accustomed to. An Afghan battle consists of two sets of men snugly hidden away among the rocks, firing away at each other until one side loses a few men and then retires. So they were quite at home at their skirmishing work, and certainly more than a match for the same number of Persians. What they will do when an attack on a breach is made by a column remains to be seen."

Night and day the Heratees worked at their defences, while the Persians raised batteries and fortified their camp against sudden attacks. After four or five days of comparative quiet a heavy cannonade broke out. Artillery played upon the walls, mortars threw shell into the town, and rockets whizzed overhead. For a time the consternation in the city was prodigious; the rockets especially, which were altogether new to them, appalled the inhabitants, who, as night came on, gathered on the roofs of their houses and watched with affright the sharp trains of light, and shuddered at the sound of the fiery missiles. The sound of lamentation, the cries of fear, and the prayers to Allah resounded over the city; but the panic abated somewhat when it was found that comparatively little injury was effected. But while the peaceful inhabitants wailed and p ed, the troops and the men who had come in from the Afghan villages laboured steadily and silently at the work of repairing the damages effected by the fire of the Persian batteries.

But little could be done to the face of the wall, but the crumbling parapets and earth dug up from open spaces were used to construct a fresh wall behind the old one at points

against which the Persian guns played most fiercely, so that when a breach was formed the assailants would find an unlooked-for obstacle to their entrance into the town. This work was directed by Pottinger, who took but little rest, remaining constantly at his post, and only snatching an hour's sleep now and then. Angus assisted to the best of his power, always taking his place when his comrade could no longer battle against sleep, and seeing that everything went on well. The Afghans yielded a willing obedience to the orders of these young strangers. They saw the utility of the work upon which they were engaged, and laboured well and steadily. The Persian artillery were, fortunately for the besieged, badly commanded. Instead of concentrating their fire upon one spot, in which case a breach would have been effected in a few hours, each gunner directed his aim as he thought best, and the shot which, if poured upon a single point, would have brought down the crumbling wall, effected no material damage, scattered as it was over a face a mile in length.

It was all the less effective, inasmuch as the artillerymen generally aimed at the parapet of the wall instead of the solid portion below it. It was a delight to them to see a portion of the parapet knocked down by their shot, whereas when the wall itself was hit comparatively small show was made. Many of the shot flew high and passed over the town into the fields beyond it, and at the end of four days' almost continuous firing, Herat was stronger and more capable of resistance than it was when the Persians first appeared before the walls. The absence of any tangible result evidently lowered the spirits of the besiegers, while it proportionately raised those of the defenders. Moreover, the immense expenditure of projectiles by the Persians showed the Shah and his generals that, large as was the store of ammunition they had brought with them, it might prove insufficient, and the labour and time which would be entailed in renewing the

supply from the magazines at the capital would be enormous. Consequently the fire became irregular, sometimes for an hour or two all the batteries would play, while at other times only a few guns would be discharged in the course of an hour.

The shells that were thrown into the city did much more damage than the round shot of the batteries. Many houses were almost destroyed by them, and whole families killed. These, however, were for the most part peaceable Sheeahs, and the matter in no way affected the defenders of the wall, whose spirits rose daily as they perceived that the Persian artillery was by no means so formidable as they had anticipated. The Persians made no attempt to blockade the city, evidently fearing the sorties the defenders made, and confined their operations to that side of the city before which they were encamped. This was a great advantage to the besieged. Three out of the five gates of the city stood open, communications were maintained with the surrounding country, the cattle and other animals went out to graze, and firewood and other commodities passed freely into the town.

Throughout December the Persians were harassed by nightly attacks. The working parties in their entrenchments were driven out, tools carried off, the workmen killed, and the work performed during the day destroyed, the assailants retiring before heavy masses of infantry could be brought up to repel them. Upon many days scarce a shot was fired, then for a few hours there would be a lively cannonade, but of the same scattered and wasteful fashion as before.

On December 26th all the Persian prisoners who had been captured in the sorties were sent off for sale to the frontier of the Turkoman country. The Shah retaliated by putting to death in various cruel manners the Afghan prisoners who had fallen into his hands. Two days later a mine was sprung and a breach effected in the wall. The Persians advanced to

storm it, but were met with the greatest resolution by the Heratees, who repulsed them with considerable loss, their leader being severely wounded, and a deserter from Herat, a man of high military reputation among the Afghans, killed —a fact that caused almost as much joy to the defenders as the repulse of the assault. The success, however, of the mine, and the knowledge that the Persians were engaged in driving several tunnels towards the wall, caused a considerable feeling of uneasiness. Nevertheless, the 30th, which was the day of the termination of the long Mohammedan fast, was celebrated with the usual rejoicings, which the besieged were enabled to take part in without fear of an attack, as the day was being celebrated with similar festivities in the Persian camp.

Shah Kamran went with his family in procession to the principal mosque, and after the conclusion of the prayers usual to the occasion, observed the custom of scattering sweetmeats to be scrambled for by the priests. To their disappointment, however, he did not follow this up by inviting them to a banquet, but sent extra provisions to the troops and the workers on the walls. There was now a pause in active operations for more than three weeks. The Persians laboured at their mines, but either from ignorance of their work, or on account of the water flowing from the moat into their galleries, no damage resulted. The Heratees countermined under the advice of Pottinger, but beyond proving that the Persian galleries were not being driven where they expected, nothing came of it. But on the 26th of January the Afghans determined to give battle to the Persians in the open. Again the whole population gathered on the walls, and the two young Englishmen were also there.

"The wuzeer asked me this morning whether I would go out with them," Pottinger said to Angus, "but I replied that, although acquainted with artillery and siege operations, I did

not know enough of the Afghan way of fighting to accept even a small command in the field. I am useful here," he went on, "and I should be of no use whatever outside. The Afghans have their own ideas as to when to advance and when to retreat; besides, it might offend some of the leaders were I, a stranger, to interfere in any way. There is no jealousy of me at present, at least I think not. They know nothing of sieges, and there is no one who holds any special post in connection with the fortifications. No one therefore feels superseded. In the next place, the work is for the most part carried out by labourers, who get paid for their services, and not by the troops, and it is nothing to them whether they get their orders from an Englishman or an Afghan. In an attack on a breach I should certainly fight; in the first place, because I consider it my duty, and in the second, because, if the Persians get inside the walls, you may be sure that there will be something like a general massacre."

The Afghan cavalry and infantry poured out from the gate, and spread themselves over the open country to the east of the Persian camp. The men on foot took possession of a village, and established themselves in its houses and the gardens surrounding it. From the wall a view could be obtained of the movements in the enemy's camp. The vedettes had fallen back as soon as the Afghans issued out, drums were beaten and horns sounded, the troops ran hastily together, and their general, Mahomed Khan, could be seen galloping about issuing orders. Presently a strong column moved out. It was headed by cavalry; and as soon as these made their appearance the Afghan horse galloped across the plain, while the crowd on the walls burst into shouts of encouragement, although the troops were too far off to hear them.

"It is a pretty sight, Angus, but about as unlike modern warfare as could well be. European cavalry seeing a mob of horsemen coming down upon them in such disorder would

ride at them, and no irregular horse could withstand the impact of a well-disciplined and compact cavalry charge. There, the Persians are forming line; but there is no smartness about it, it is done in a half-hearted sort of way, as if they did not like the business before them. There, they are off; but they are too slow, they won't be fairly in a gallop before the Afghans are upon them."

For a minute or two the contending bodies were mixed in a confused mass, then the shouts of the spectators rose high as the Persians could be seen flying towards their infantry hotly pursued by the Afghans. Then came the rattle of musketry, the quick reports of cannon, as the infantry and artillery covered the retreat of their cavalry. Presently the Heratee horse were seen retiring from the village in which the struggle had taken place; another body, which had not yet been engaged, instead of riding forward to support them, also, turned, and for a time all rode off, while the Persian cavalry were reinforced from the camp and pursued them. The Heratees soon recovered themselves and again charged, but again the leading squadrons were badly supported by those behind. These were under another leader, who was probably influenced by jealousy or by tribal hostility, and the Persian horse, well supported by their infantry, gradually gained the advantage, their own infantry coming to the support. The Afghan footmen also advanced, and the fight was maintained during the whole day.

"It is like playing at war," Pottinger said irritably; "except in that first charge they have never really come to blows. It is skirmishing rather than fighting. Here there are some ten or twelve thousand men, taking both sides, cavalry, infantry, and a few guns. I don't think that when our men come in again it will be found that they have lost a hundred, and I don't suppose the Persians have lost much more. It is a fair field for fighting, and between two Euro-

pean forces of the same strength a long day's battle would probably have caused three or four thousand casualties. One would think that neither party was in earnest. Certainly the Heratees are, though I don't suppose the Persian soldiers have any particular personal interest in the matter."

The action was altogether indecisive, and at the end of the day the Persians held no ground beyond the village where their infantry first opened fire, while the Heratees had gained nothing by their sortie. When the Afghans re-entered the walls it was found that Pottinger's estimate as to the amount of loss was very near the truth; there were between twenty-five and thirty killed, and some four times as many wounded, more or less seriously. They of course claimed a victory, and were highly satisfied with their own doings, but the operations only tended to show that neither party had any eagerness for real fighting.

On the 7th of February Pottinger said: "I have received permission to go into the Persian camp to-morrow. Kamran has given me a message on his part to the Persian king. It is an appeal to him to retire. He says that when Khorassan was in rebellion he refused the entreaties of its chief to aid them, although at that time he could have raised ten thousand horsemen, and might, with the rebels of Khorassan, have marched to Teheran. He had sent one of his highest officers to congratulate the Shah on his succession, and now the latter is without provocation marching against him. He prays him therefore to retire, to aid him with guns and men to recover the dominions he has lost in Afghanistan, and if he be successful he will hand over Herat to him. Yar Mahomed has also given me a message to the Persian minister, just the sort of message I should have expected from him. He declares that he is devoted to the Shah and to him, but that he is bound to stand by his master. That whatever might be his own wish, the Afghans would never surrender the city, and

that he dare not propose such a thing to them, but that he shall ever remain the faithful servant of the Shah and of the minister whom he regards as his father. I will take you with me if you wish, but that must be a matter for your own consideration."

"I should, of course, like to go," Angus said, "but I do not know that it would be wise for me to do so. Mr. M'Neill may be in the Persian camp. It is not probable that I should be recognized, still there must be many officials there who came frequently to see him at the embassy, and who would know me. Should one of these declare that I was a member of the mission, it might create a very bad impression against M'Neill, as it would seem that he was in secret communication with Kamran."

"That is just what I was thinking," Pottinger said, "and I must say that I agree with you. It certainly would be awkward for him if it were known that one of his suite was in Herat. Yes, I think it would be better that you should not go. We shall certainly be the centre of curiosity while we are in the camp, and there would be no possibility of private communications between you and M'Neill. But should I see him have you any message for him? I think we have agreed that when this business is over it will be much better for you to go with me back to India than to return to Teheran."

"Yes, I have quite settled that," Angus said. "With the kind offer you have made to present me to your uncle I should think that the prospect of my obtaining advancement there is very much greater than it is in Persia, where I might be left altogether in the lurch if M'Neill were recalled. I shall be obliged, therefore, if you will tell him of my intention, and thank him for me very heartily for his kindness. He will, I am sure, approve of the step, for he has several times told me that he was sorry he could see no chance of my ob-

taining more than a clerkship at the mission, and advised me on no account to think of remaining there if I could see my way to doing better for myself."

"I will be sure to give M'Neill the message if I see him but I don't expect to be long in the camp. I am charged with such a ridiculous message that there is no likelihood of any discussion taking place. The minister will, of course, scoff at Yar Mahomed's declarations of respect for the Shah and affection for himself, and the Shah, after taking the trouble to collect an army and come here himself, is not likely to retire at the request of Kamran. My real hope in going is that I may find a British officer with the Persians. There is almost certain to be one, as the Russians have, it is said, several. Through him I may send messages to friends at home and to my uncle in Scinde. They must all begin to feel anxious about me."

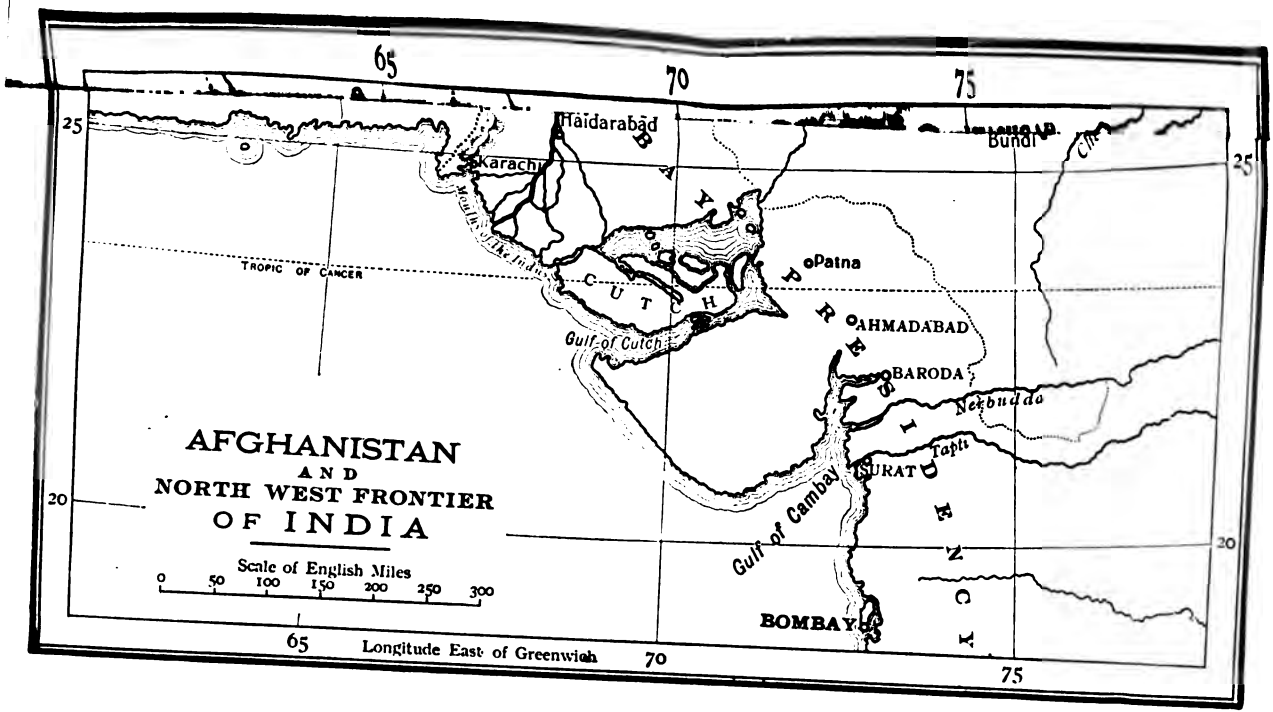
Angus saw his companion ride out the next morning with some anxiety as to his reception, but with no particular regret that he did not accompany him. He had often been in the encampments of the Persian troops before the army left Teheran, and there would therefore be nothing new to him in the scene. Pottinger as usual wore the dress of an Afghan of some standing, and was accompanied only by one mounted attendant and a runner to hold his horse. A small party of Afghans rode with him for some distance beyond the walls, and then, shouting good wishes for his return in safety, left him. Angus continued to watch the men at their work for two or three hours, and then took his place on the walls again and watched for his comrade's return. It was not, however, till the 10th that he came back to Herat.

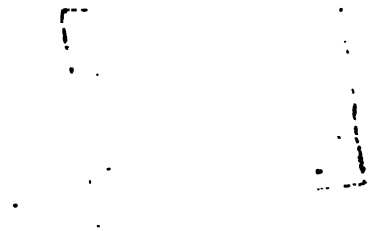
On the previous day he was prevented from returning by a violent storm which raged from morning till night, and considerable anxiety was felt in the town. That he had gone on a mission from Kamran was generally known, but none

save the Shah and his wuzeer were aware of its nature. Angus was much alarmed, as he thought it too probable that his friend had been shot by the Persian outposts as soon as he arrived among them, for there was nothing to show that he came as an envoy. He was therefore greatly relieved when a native brought the news to him that the Englishman was returning. As the news spread it caused great excitement. When Pottinger rode in at the gate a great crowd had assembled there, and all thronged round him asking for information. He replied that they must enquire of the wuzeer, who alone could deliver it. As he saw Angus in the crowd he shouted to him, "As I expected, nothing has come of it; meet me at the house."

An hour later Pottinger arrived there. "I was getting very anxious about you," Angus said, "and was beginning to fear that you had been shot by the Persian outposts."

"I was a little uncomfortable myself, and I kept a good look-out, as you may suppose. The roads led through those ruined villages, and at any moment I might have a bullet whizzing about my ears. Presently I saw some Persian soldiers running towards the road, and I told my man to take off his turban and wave it to show that our intentions were peaceable. When they perceived this they came straggling up. I told them that I was an English officer, and the bearer of messages to the Shah and his minister. They seemed delighted, chiefly perhaps from the fact of my being an Englishman, but also because they hoped that I had come with an offer of surrender. However, they shouted 'Welcome, welcome! the English were always friends of the Shah.' The officer who commanded the picket turned out to be a major who had served under Major Hart, and who knew all the English officers who had of late years been in Persia. He took me to the major-general commanding the attack, who turned out to be a Russian in the Persian service command-


65
70
75
25
20
Haidarabad
Karachi
Bundi
Patna
AHMADABAD
BARODA
SURAT
BOMBAY
Gulf of Cutch
Gulf of Cambay
Tropic of Cancer
Tapti
Nerbudda
AFGHANISTAN
AND
NORTH WEST FRONTIER
OF INDIA
Scale of English Miles
0 50 100 150 200 250 300
Longitude East of Greenwich



ing a corps of Russians—men who had left their own country for doubtless good reasons. At any rate, he received me courteously. We had tea, and smoked a pipe together, and he then sent me on with an escort to the Persian camp.

"The news that someone had come in from Herat to arrange terms for its submission having preceded me, almost the whole camp came out to see me, and if my escort had not used their iron ramrods most vigorously upon the heads and shoulders of the crowd I should never have got through. When I reached the minister's tent he received me graciously, but we did not enter into business; it was necessary that the Shah should first decide whether he would receive me.

"I had learned from the Russian general that Colonel Stoddart was in camp. As it was known before I left India that he would accompany the Persians I had letters for him, and received permission to go to his tent to deliver them. His astonishment at finding that I was a British officer was, as you may imagine, great. However, I had but little time to talk, for in a few minutes a message came that I was to go back at once to the minister, or, as he is called there as well as here, the wuzeer. Stoddart accompanied me. The Persian asked me what were the messages that, as he had been informed, Kamran and Yar Mahomed had sent to the Shah and himself. I told him that I could only deliver Kamran's message to the Shah, and that I thought his own message had better be given him privately.

"The wuzeer, who is a bilious and excitable little man, sent everyone out from the tent but Stoddart and myself, and I then delivered the message. We had a long discussion. The wuzeer declared that the English themselves had put down Herat as forming part of the Persian dominions in the map that Burnes had made. I said that I thought not. He produced the map to convince me, but to the little man's intense

disgust he found that he was altogether wrong. He then appealed to Stoddart. The latter, as our military representative at the Shah's court, replied diplomatically that he had no instructions on the subject, and would refer the case to the envoy at Teheran. (M'Neill, by the by, has not yet reached the camp.) Stoddart said that he was not aware that the Persian government had annexed Herat, as its ruler had, both with the British government and the late Shah, been acknowledged as sovereign in Afghanistan; so, as I expected, nothing came of the interview. We went back to Stoddart's tent, and shortly afterwards were sent for by the Shah. He received us with courtesy, and I delivered Kamran's message.

"The Shah replied, speaking with dignity and calmness, and stating his complaints against Kamran, that he had permitted his soldiers constantly to make incursions into Persian dominions, robbing and slaying, and carrying off Persian subjects to sell as slaves; then gradually warming up as he recited a number of such forays and depredations, he denounced Kamran as a treacherous liar, and said that he would not rest satisfied until he had planted a Persian garrison in the city of Herat. Of course there was nothing more to be said. We were formally, though courteously, dismissed, and I went back with Stoddart to his tent, where I remained till this morning. I was by no means sorry that the tremendous storm yesterday afforded an excuse for stopping, and I enjoyed my day of quiet talk with Stoddart immensely.

"He thinks that if the Persians do but make an attack with all their strength the town must be taken, in which I entirely agree with him. He said, however, that, as the slackness of their fire for some time past has shown, the Persians are heartily sick of the business, and if the Shah had some really good excuse for retiring he would gladly do so. I said that the best excuse would be some strong action on the part of our government. He replied that he had himself

urged this upon M'Neill, and that the envoy had already written urgently home in that sense. Of course I told him of your being there. He had already heard from M'Neill that he had sent you here to encourage Kamran to hold out. He asked a good deal about you, and quite agreed with me that with your knowledge of languages—and I told him that in the three months during which you had been here you had already learned enough Pushtoo to converse in it freely—you would be sure to get an appointment in India, as it was extremely probable that an army would shortly be sent into Afghanistan to support Shah Soojah against Dost Mahomed, especially as the latter had received Vickovich, an aide-de-camp to the governor of Orenburg, as an envoy at Cabul.

"Of course I had heard about the intention of supporting Dost Mahomed before I started. I know that my uncle and Mr. Burnes, who is our agent at Cabul, are both strongly opposed to this. Dost Mahomed has always defeated Shah Soojah, he is firmly established on his throne, and Burnes believes that he is very well disposed towards us. However, that is not our affair; but if there should be such an expedition it much increases your chance of obtaining an official post. I took the opportunity to write to my uncle and to send my report to the Indian government, and in both cases I stated that I had received the most valuable assistance from a young gentleman who was temporarily attached to the mission at Teheran, and who, speaking as he did, Persian, Pushtoo, and Arabic, would, I considered, be of great service should any difficulties arise with Afghanistan. I said that I had seized the opportunity of recommending you, as it was possible that I myself might fall in the defence of Herat."

"It was awfully kind of you, Pottinger, and I am extremely obliged to you."

"I felt that I was acting in the interest of the Indian

government as well as of yourself. The siege may last for another month yet, and by the end of that time you will be able to pass as easily as an Afghan as you now can as a Persian, and may be invaluable; for as we have as yet had very little contact with Afghanistan there are not, I should say, half a dozen officers in our service who can speak Pushtoo—probably not one who could do so well enough to pass as a native. I myself knew but little of it when I started, so my disguise was that of a Cutch horse-dealer, and I passed through Afghanistan as a native of India. Even now I do not speak Pushtoo as well as you do, having devoted myself to Persian, while you have been working at Afghan. For your sake I hope that the siege may last for some time yet, as it may be a great advantage to you when you apply for an official post to be able to say that you can pass anywhere as a native."

CHAPTER IV

A STURDY DEFENCE

POTTINGER'S belief that the Shah was anxious to bring the war to a conclusion was confirmed by the arrival of the major he had met when going into the Persian camp, with instructions from the Russian general, endorsed by the minister, to endeavour to persuade the Afghans to consent to the terms offered by the Shah. It was better, he urged, for them to settle their differences among themselves than to employ mediation. He warned them that as the English had come to India under the pretence of trading, and had finally conquered the whole country, they should on no account be trusted. He assured them that the Shah had

no desire to interfere in the internal administration of Herat, the present movement was not an expedition against Herat but against Hindostan, and that all true Mohammedans should join the Shah's army, and that he would lead them to the conquest and plunder of all India and Turkestan.

Pottinger was sent for privately, and consulted by the Kamran and the wuzeer as to what answer should be sent. His advice was taken, and the next day the envoy returned to his camp with vague assurances of regard, and the suggestion that if the Persians were really inclined for peace, the best proof that they could give of the sincerity of their inclination would be the retirement of the besieging force. There was much excitement in the city when the proposals brought by the Persian officer became known, and many of the older men began to argue that it did not matter much whether Kamran was called prince or king, or whether the supremacy of the Persian Shah was or was not acknowledged in Herat, as long as no Persian garrison was placed in the city. The wuzeer, however, remained firm. He declared that he had no confidence in the Persians, that he desired to be guided by the advice and be aided by the mediation of the English, and that if the Shah would place the conduct of negotiations in the hands of Colonel Stoddart, he on his part would trust everything to Lieutenant Pottinger, and would accept whatever was decided upon by the two English officers.

"That was his own decision, and not mine," Pottinger said, when he returned from an interview with the wuzeer. "There is no doubt that, ruffian as he is in many respects, he is a clever man. You see, he shifts all the responsibility for the continuance of the war off his shoulders on to those of the Persians, for their refusal to accept the decision of the British officer in their camp will convince the Afghans that

the Persians will be satisfied with nothing but their destruction."

Two days later the Persian officer returned to Herat with a letter stating that the Shah had no desire to possess himself of the town, but only claimed that his sovereignty should be acknowledged. The answer was the same as before. Kamran was willing to do all that was required if the Persian army would but retire. The negotiations were carried on for a day or two longer, but though both parties desired peace, the one would not surrender, the other would not retire and acknowledge failure. Hostilities, therefore, continued without intermission, and a fortnight later the Persians gained possession of a fortified place three hundred yards from the north-east angle of the wall. The Afghans stationed there had made but a poor resistance, and upon entering the town their faces were smeared with mud, and they were sent through the city accompanied by a crier who proclaimed their cowardice.

A month passed without any incident of importance, and at the end of that time M'Neill arrived at the Persian camp. Every effort had been made to hinder him on his way from Teheran, and he was at first coldly received. A week later he had an audience with the Shah, and stated to him that the attack upon Herat was an obvious violation of the treaty between Great Britain and Herat, and the British government would therefore be justified in taking active measures to enforce its terms. The Shah upon this consented to accept the British mediation.

Three days later, however, the Persians made a serious attack. Some new batteries opened against the ramparts near the great mosque. Their fire was this time concentrated, and the wall crumbled so rapidly that by the evening a practicable breach had been made. The Afghans, however, did not lose heart, declaring that they trusted to themselves,

and not to their walls, to defend the city. They had, indeed, gained an advantage in the middle of the day. They blew in a mine that had been carried almost up to the wall, and taking advantage of the alarm caused by the explosion rushed out and furiously attacked the besiegers, carrying the trenches for some distance before a strong Persian force came up and drove them back again. So heavy a fire was then opened from the trenches on the musketeers on the walls, that these were completely overpowered, and were unable to show a head above the parapets. As evening came on the Persians shouted that an English officer wished to enter the town, but the wuzeer shouted back that no one would be allowed to enter at that hour. The next day Major Todd, who was attached to the embassy, entered the town. He was in full regimentals, and his appearance excited the most lively admiration of the populace. He announced that the Shah was ready to accept the mediation of the British government. He was received with the greatest courtesy by Shah Kamran, who after the interview took a cloak from his own shoulders and sent it by the wuzeer to Major Todd, who returned to the Persian camp with the assurance of Kamran's desire to accept the mediation of the British minister.

But though apparently both parties had at last arrived at an understanding, that evening the aspect of affairs became more warlike than ever. The Persian trenches were filled with men, the bodies of horse and foot on the line of investment were strengthened, and there were all appearances that an assault would be made that evening; and the Afghan chiefs were called together and each had his post assigned to him. But scarcely had they separated when Mr. M'Neill himself arrived. He was conducted at once to Kamran's palace, and the greater part of the night was spent in discussion. It was nearly dawn when the minister accompanied Pottinger to the latter's residence. As he had

arranged when he arrived that he would sleep at Pottinger's, a room had been prepared for him, Angus sat up for several hours, but then feeling sure that the minister would at once retire to bed on his return, had lain down. When he awoke it was half-past six, and dressing hastily he went into the sitting-room that he shared with Pottinger, and to his surprise found Mr. M'Neill writing there. The minister greeted him cordially.

"I heard all about you from Colonel Stoddart, and approve highly of your remaining here to give Pottinger what aid you can during the siege. I also think that you have done very wisely in determining, as Pottinger told Stoddart you had done, to go to India. I myself will write to the English government saying what you have done, how intelligently you carried on your work at the mission, and recommending you for an appointment on the northern frontier either with the army or the resident at Scinde, or perhaps better still, with Mr. Burnes at Cabul."

At this moment Pottinger entered the room, and he was as surprised as Angus had been at seeing the minister at work after only a couple of hours in bed. There was another meeting with Kamran, who placed himself entirely in the hands of the British envoy, and said that he would gladly consent to any terms agreed upon by him. At the conclusion of the meeting Mr. M'Neill returned at once to the Persian camp.

To the disappointment of all, Major Todd rode in two days later with the surprising news that the Shah had entirely changed his attitude, and absolutely refused to submit the dispute to British arbitration, and that unless the whole people of Herat acknowledged themselves his subjects, he would take possession of the city by force of arms. This sudden change was the result of the arrival of the Russian representative, Count Symonwich, on the morning of the day of M'Neill's visit to the city. The Russian

party at once became ascendant. He himself took the conduct of the operations of the siege, the officers with him taught the Persian soldiers how to construct batteries, and Russian money was freely distributed among them. Pottinger's task of explaining to Kamran the news brought by Major Todd was an unpleasant one; but the old man took the news quietly, and said that he never expected anything else, for the Persians had always been noted for their treachery and want of faith. The news, however, caused great discouragement in the town, and it was determined at a meeting of the chiefs that they would send to the Russian ambassador and place themselves under the protection of his master. Meeting after meeting was held, at all of which Pottinger was present. Sometimes he was received and listened to with respect, and other times he was treated with marked discourtesy.

The influence of Mr. M'Neill at the Persian court declined rapidly, while that of the Russians became supreme. For some months past he had failed to obtain any satisfaction for matters of serious complaint. As far back as October a courier bearing despatches from Colonel Stoddart to him at Teheran had been seized by a Russian officer, stripped and imprisoned by the Persians, and his despatches taken from him. The British resident in the Persian Gulf had been grossly insulted by the governor of Bushire, and the Persian government had continued to evade its obligations under the commercial treaty between the two nations. So marked was the indignity with which M'Neill was now treated in the Persian camp, that on the 7th of June he left it with Colonel Stoddart and all his suite and attendants, a step equivalent to a rupture of the relations between Great Britain and Persia.

In the meantime the pressure of famine and sickness became more and more intense in Herat. The city was alto-

gether without drainage, and the stench from the bodies of those who had died or been killed, and of the dead animals, was dreadful. But although much depressed, the courage of the Afghans still sustained them, and when on the 13th of June the Persians surprised the outer works, they held the connecting passage and defended it until assistance came, when the garrison poured out, rushed down the slope, and dislodged the assailants with much slaughter. Another attempt on the same day at a fresh point was equally unsuccessful, and the storming party were twice repulsed. Pottinger was now armed with an authority that he had not before possessed, for he had been appointed by M'Neill British envoy at Herat. The news of the departure of the embassy, and Pottinger's assurances that this was a prelude to war between England and Persia, had but little effect. It was certain that the city could not possibly hold out many weeks, and it might be months before the arrival of a British fleet and army could influence the Persians.

Happily, however, Lord Auckland, Governor-General of India, had not waited for instructions from home, but at the news of the investment of Herat, and the outrage upon our resident in the Persian Gulf, had begun to take steps early in the spring; and on the 4th of June two transports and some vessels of war left Bombay harbour with detachments of two British regiments and a marine battalion, and on the 19th anchored off the island of Karrack in the Persian Gulf.

Upon the 24th of June Herat went through the most terrible experience of the siege. At daybreak a heavy fire opened from the Persian batteries on all four sides of the city. It ceased suddenly after a time. Pottinger, who was at breakfast, exclaimed to Angus, as he leapt up from his seat: "They are going to assault; the batteries have done their work. Quick, to the wall!"

Warning the soldiers they came upon as they ran, they made their way to the wall. Just as they arrived there another gun was fired, and at the signal the batteries on all sides again broke into life. A storm of rockets carried dismay into the town, the mortars dropped their shells into it, and most conclusive of all, a rattle of musketry broke out, growing every moment in power. Against five points was the assault directed. That on the gate of Candahar was repulsed, and the enemy chased back to their trenches. That upon the south-west angle was but a feint, and was never pushed home against the western gate. The Russian regiment under Sampson, and a strong force under a Persian officer, pressed up to the breach; but the Persian was killed and Sampson carried off wounded, and the troops fled after suffering immense loss. The attack on the north-western face was similarly repulsed, but the fifth contest was desperate. The storming party gained the *fausse braye.* The Afghans defending it fought desperately, and all fell at their post. The storming party rushed up the slope. The officers and leading men were mown down by a heavy musketry fire, but after a fierce struggle the upper *fausse braye* was carried, and some of the assailants gained the head of the breach.

But now the Afghan reserves were brought up, and the Persians on the breach were driven back. Again and again, the Persians fighting this time with desperate courage, struggled to effect a lodgment, only to be repulsed, and fell back in confusion on their comrades behind. For a long time the issue was doubtful; a desperate hand-to-hand conflict raged, the assailants and defenders swayed up and down the breach, which was covered with corpses and slippery with blood.

Yar Mahomed arrived almost at the same time as Pottinger and Angus, for these, before coming here, had seen that all was going well at the other points attacked.

They had observed as they came along men leaving the breach by twos and threes under pretence of assisting wounded comrades, and Pottinger saw to his dismay that the men were losing heart. As they came to the breach they found other soldiers coming up. The wuzeer was sitting down close by. Pottinger ran up to him. "You must encourage your men, wuzeer; go forward and join them, or all will be lost."

The Afghan scarcely seemed to hear what he said. "You must come," Pottinger repeated loudly; "there is no time to be lost." Then he turned to Angus: "Do what you can," he said. "I must rouse the wuzeer; evidently his nerves have suddenly given way."

Glad at last to be free to join in the struggle, Angus drew his sword and ran down, thrusting back those who were mounting, and pushed his way forward to the front, shouting in Pushtoo: "Fight, men! fight for your faith, your wives, and your children! Everything is going on well elsewhere. Are you alone going to fail?"

The bearded Afghans, astonished at seeing this young Englishman rushing forward in advance of them, followed him, and again the Persians were beaten back. But although the Afghans in front had been animated by the lad's example, those behind were still dropping off. The wuzeer, aroused by the vigorous exhortations of Pottinger, had risen up and neared the breach. The Persians were renewing their attack, and the wuzeer called upon his men to fight. The fugitives paused irresolute. The wuzeer's heart failed him again, and he turned back, his action still further discouraging the men. Pottinger, in the most vehement language, exhorted him to set an example. Again he turned and advanced, but again shrank back. Pottinger now instead of entreating reviled and threatened him, called him opprobrious names, and at last, seizing him by his arm, dragged him forward to the

breach. This astounding treatment maddened the Afghan. He shouted to the soldiers to fight, and as they continued to fall back, seized a large staff, and, rushing like a madman upon the soldiers, drove them forward again with a shower of heavy blows, while Pottinger sword in hand seconded him. Cooped up as they were, and seeing no other outlet of escape, many of them leapt wildly down over the parapet, rushed down the slope, and fell upon the Persian stormers. Believing that great reinforcements must have arrived, these were seized by a panic, abandoned their position, and fled.

Herat was saved entirely by the energy and courage of the young English lieutenant. Pottinger's first question was as to his companion. He had, while urging the wuzeer to advance, caught sight of him fighting desperately in the midst of the Persians, and he at once made his way down to that spot. He was not long in discovering Angus, who was lying insensible, bleeding from a number of sabre wounds. Calling four Afghans, he ordered him to be carried on to the wall. There he bandaged his wounds, and then had him placed on a stretcher and carried to their lodging, taking on himself to send an order to the wuzeer's own medical attendant to go there at once and attend to his wounds. Then he turned his attention to the wuzeer. The mind of the minister had been almost unhinged by the terrible events, and he was still wandering about in a confused and bewildered way. Several of the other chiefs were similarly affected, and were unable for days afterwards to perform their usual duties.

The soldiers themselves, instead of being excited over their victory, were as gloomy and depressed as if they had suffered a defeat. The peril had been so great, the city had been so nearly lost, that there was a general feeling that another such attack would be successful. Their confidence hitherto had rested upon the wuzeer, and on the conviction

that their courage was infinitely greater than that of the Persians, and they had found that the Persians could now fight as well and stoutly as they themselves. They were humiliated by knowing that it was to a young English officer they owed it that the Persians had failed in their object, and that another young Englishman, scarce more than a boy, had led their best and bravest into the thick of the fray, and had himself penetrated beyond them into the midst of the Persians and had fallen there. None appreciate bravery more than do the Afghans. It was not so much that Pottinger had exposed himself recklessly to the shower of bullets with which the Persians in their trenches swept the spot where he was standing with the wuzeer, but that he should have ventured to abuse, revile, and even forcibly drag their dreaded leader forward astounded them.

All Herat felt that it was he who had saved the city, and the fame of the deed spread through the country round, and men when they came in sought him out and kissed his hand with enthusiasm. A deep gloom, however, hung over the city. Even the work of repairing the damaged fortifications was carried on apathetically. They had repulsed the Persians, but it was felt that nothing but a miracle could enable them to withstand another such assault. Food was all but exhausted, the treasury was empty. the inhabitants could not be fed, the soldiers could not be paid. But an equal amount of depression was felt in the Persian camp. Five assaults had all failed, and some eighteen hundred of their best troops had fallen. The loss of officers had been enormous; the Russian general, Berowski, had been killed, and two of the principal Persian generals. Another Russian general, Sampson, and two pashas had been wounded, and almost all the field officers of the regiments engaged in the attack were hors de combat.

Pottinger's position was a very painful one. The need

for money to pay the troops was absolute, and the wuzeer, when he had recovered from the effects of his scare, instituted a reign of terror even more terrible than anything the wretched inhabitants had ever before felt. The soldiers went from house to house, and all suspected of possessing money were seized and tortured. Even ladies of rank were so treated, and the very inmates of Kamran's zenana were threatened and had to contribute their jewels. Pottinger felt that it was solely owing to his influence that the city had so long held out, and as he went through the streets starving men reproached him as the author of their sufferings. He did all that he could, but that was little. Men of all ranks came to him imploring his aid and protection. Some he was able to save, but for others he could do nothing. Never was a young soldier placed in so terrible a dilemma. As a man he was agonized by the sufferings he saw round him—sufferings he could at once bring to an end by advising the wuzeer to surrender: as a soldier and an Englishman, he felt that it was his duty to hold out to the bitter end.

His position became still more difficult when, a fortnight after the assault, the Persians again opened negotiations, demanding, however, as a first step that he should be expelled from the city. Pottinger declared that no thought of personal safety should persuade him to stand in the way of any arrangement conducive to the safety of Herat and the welfare of his country, and that if these could be gained by his departure he would willingly leave the town. But Yar Mahomed was undecided. He felt that the dismissal of the man who had saved Herat would be a stain on his character, and, moreover, that the Persians having obtained his dismissal, would become still more exorbitant in their demands. He had long expected the arrival of a relieving force of Turkomans, and Pottinger was convinced that ere long the intervention of England would compel the Persians

to fall back. The bombardment of the city had not been renewed since the repulse of the attack, and the Persians relied now solely upon famine to reduce it, and maintained a strict blockade.

In order to mitigate the horrors he saw around him, Pottinger undertook that all who voluntarily brought in their money should be reimbursed at his recommendation by the British government. This brought some money in, though slowly, and July passed. Then a deserter from the Persian camp brought in news that there was a report that a great British army had landed in the Persian Gulf, had taken Bushire, and was advancing. This report had fortunately enormously magnified the strength of the British expedition, and the news gave fresh life to the defenders of Herat. The Persians again opened negotiations, waiving the question of the expulsion of Pottinger, but the wuzeer was less inclined than before to yield to the Persian demands.

M'Neill was on his way to the frontier when he was informed of the arrival of the British expedition to the Persian Gulf, and at the same time received instructions from the Foreign Office in anticipation of the refusal of the Shah to retire from before Herat. Fortified by these instructions, he despatched Colonel Stoddart to the Persian camp with a message to the Shah. He arrived there on the 11th of August, and on the next day had an interview with the Shah, who welcomed him with cordiality, and listened to the message from the British government.

"It means, then," he said, "that if I do not leave Herat there will be war?"

"It all depends upon your Majesty's answer," Stoddart replied.

Two days later Stoddart was again summoned to the royal presence. "We consent," the Shah said, "to the whole of the demands from the British government. We will not

go to war. Were it not for the sake of their friendship, we should not return from before Herat. Had we known that by our coming here we should risk the loss of their friendship, we certainly should not have come at all."

In reply, Colonel Stoddart said he thanked God that his Majesty had taken so wise a view of the real interests of Persia. But as he left the audience, he hinted to the Persian minister that although the Shah's answer was very satisfactory, it would be more satisfactory still to see it at once reduced to practice. Although rumours reached the city that the Persians were about to leave, it was not for another week that the rumours became a certainty. An effort was made to induce the wuzeer to make some concessions that would give a better grace to the withdrawal of the Shah. Some of the conditions suggested were refused by Pottinger's advice; but on the 4th of September the Persian prisoners in the town were sent into camp, and on the 9th the Persian army began their march back to Teheran.

It was time indeed that they did so, for they had but three or four days' supply of forage remaining, and their flour and grain were almost all exhausted. Their failure to capture so weakly fortified a place was, in Pottinger's opinion, due to the fact that there was no union of effort. The commanders of the various sections of the army acted independently, and except when, under the command of the Russians, they made a simultaneous attack, they never acted in concert with each other. It was his opinion that the Shah might have carried the city by assault the very first day that he reached Herat. He declared that the Persians were equally as brave as and far better soldiers than the Afghans, and that they had an ample supply of artillery to capture a strong fortress if properly employed.

For a week after the struggle of the 24th of June Angus

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Campbell lay between life and death. He had lost a great quantity of blood, and when first carried to his room his Armenian friends believed him to be dead. Pottinger, who had hurried back as soon as he saw that there was no chance of a renewal of the assault, went to Kamran's and obtained some spirits, and with the aid of these the action of the heart, which had before been so slight that the pulse could not be felt, was stimulated, and respiration grew stronger. Kamran's doctor had already declared that none of the wounds were in themselves dangerous, but that he despaired of the patient recovering. Pottinger, however, by no means despaired; he procured some fresh meat, and ordered a servant to make the strongest broth possible, and to pour a spoonful between the patient's lips every few minutes. Angus was wrapped in warm blankets, and a large bottle of hot water placed against his feet. The wounds had already been carefully dressed and bandaged by the surgeon, for although almost entirely ignorant as to the use of drugs, Afghan doctors had abundant practice in the treatment of wounds.

Pottinger remained two or three hours, and then, seeing that Angus was breathing regularly though feebly, and that the pulse could now be felt at the wrist, hurried off to see that the work of repairing the breach had been taken in hand, Kajàr's wife undertaking to look after the patient. For a week the issue of the struggle was doubtful; then the improvement, although slow, was distinct, and day by day some slight advance was made. The ladies of Kamran's zenana were much interested in the young Englishman, and frequently sent down presents of fruit and perfumes. Both were welcome. The air of Herat was very unfavourable to wounds, but a little scent sprinkled on a muslin curtain drawn across the window to some extent neutralized the terrible stenches of the town, and a handkerchief steeped

in water to which a little of the perfume had been added, was laid lightly over the bandages.

In three weeks Angus was able to sit up for a time, and a week later he walked across the room. His progress was now more rapid, and by the end of July he was able to sit a donkey as far as the city wall, where he could breathe a purer air than that of the city, and by the end of August he could walk freely about the town. But he was listless and without energy. It was now certain that in a very short time the Persians would draw off.

"You must be out of this as soon as you can, Angus," Pottinger said to him one evening. "What you want is some mountain air. You will never get better as long as you remain in this pestilential atmosphere. It is enough to kill a healthy dog, and I only wonder that the whole population has not been swept away. When M'Neill was here, he told me that if our people interfered and Herat was saved he should appoint me officially as the British resident envoy. He said that he was sure the British government would send money and do all that was possible to alleviate the misery that has been suffered by the inhabitants; and although I would infinitely rather have other employment, it seems to me that it is clearly my duty to stay here. It is largely owing to me that these poor people have suffered for ten months the horrors of the siege, and the least I can do is to help them now, for if I did not you may be sure that any money sent by England would simply remain in the coffers of Kamran and the wuzeer. It is said, and I quite believe it, that a large proportion of the money wrung by torture from these wretched people has been retained by Yar Mahomed. It is therefore absolutely necessary, if the people are to be fed, their houses rebuilt, and matters tided over till trade recovers, that a British officer be here to receive and superintend the distribution of British

money. But the very day the gate is open you had better be off. You speak Afghan now perfectly, and I am glad to see that Azim has picked it up too. He is a capital fellow, and has watched over you since you have been ill as if you had been his father. The question is, do you feel strong enough to travel through the mountains? If not, there is nothing for it but for you to return to Teheran and stay there till your strength is restored."

Angus shook his head. "I don't think that I could stand the journey across the plains," he said, "nor that I should pick up much at Teheran, while I believe that in the hills I should soon get braced up. There is nothing really the matter with me now, except that I feel lazy. If there had been fighting going on, and there was something I must do, I should soon shake it off; but what with the sight of the misery of the people here, and the stinks, and the heat, I feel myself that I am making no progress. I believe I shall be a different man as soon as I am once out of this place and on my way to the hills. It will soon be getting cold up there, and in a fortnight I shall be fit for anything."

"I think you are right, Angus; I would give a good deal myself for a few hours in the fresh mountain air. I do think that you are strong enough to travel quietly. Of course you will have to do so, as I did, in disguise; and indeed this will be much more necessary now than it was a year ago. It is well known that the chiefs at Candahar have been long negotiating with Persia, and have offered to place themselves under the Shah's protection, and that, encouraged and pushed on by Russia, they have meditated an invasion of India. The news of the failure here will no doubt moderate their ardour, but from all that has been learned from Afghans who have come into the town during the siege, there is throughout the whole country a feeling of deep excitement at the prospect of another Mohammedan

invasion of India, and a conviction that the whole country would rise and join the Persians were they to advance to Candahar.

"The Afghans consider that Russian influence really means Persian influence, whereas we know that it is just the other way, and that Russia only uses Persia as her cat's-paw. As for the Persians, we know now what they are worth, and that a British division would be sufficient to smash them up. But the Afghans don't know that. They believe that Persia is the Persia of old, and that with her aid they could assuredly drive the British out of India. This being the state of feeling, your chance of getting through were it discovered that you were British would be small indeed. You must pass as a Persian who, having long traded with Herat, has learnt the Afghan language. It would be a natural story that, finding that Herat is ruined, and that there can be no trade between it and Persia for a long time, you are travelling south with the intention of fixing yourself at Candahar, and of trading between that town and India on the one side and Persia on the other. You can account for your not having merchandise with you by saying that owing to the presence of the Persian army, and marauders from Herat, and the general disturbance of the country, it would not have been safe to travel with merchandise."

"I will certainly carry out your plan," Angus said. "I don't think there will be any difficulty in getting through. But I do wish that you were coming with me."

"I hope it will not be very long before I follow you, for I think there will be some stirring work there soon."

Angus was well provided with money. He had received from Mr. M'Neill a sum that would not only cover all the expenses of his journey to Herat, but would enable him either to return to Teheran or proceed to India, as circumstances might determine. In addition to this, he had received

a year's salary in recognition of the risk he incurred. He had this sum still in his possession. The money he had brought from Tabriz he had left at the embassy, Mr. M'Neill promising to send an order for the amount should he write for it from India.

CHAPTER V

IN CANDAHAR

ON the 15th of September Angus started, after a tearful farewell from his Armenian friends. Their gratitude to him and Pottinger was unbounded. The presence and influence of their two English guests had preserved them from the rapacity and cruelty of the wuzeer, while all other merchants and traders in the town had been maltreated and robbed, and in many cases had died under the tortures inflicted to wring from them treasures it was believed they possessed. Kajar and his brother and their families alone enjoyed an immunity from persecution. Both had determined that they would leave Herat, and taking with them their workmen, establish themselves at Teheran or Tabriz, where the profit of their work might be less, but they would at least be able to enjoy it in security, such as could never be hoped for as long as Yar Mahomed was the virtual ruler of Herat.

The period that had elapsed since Angus left Teheran had changed him much. He was no longer a boy, for he had been doing man's work. He was now nearly eighteen years old, and had attained his full height of nearly six feet. His illness had pulled him down much, and sharpened his features, and except for his lighter colour, he really more closely resembled an Afghan than the Persian trader he was dressed

to represent. The pallor caused by his illness had been succeeded by a deep tan, caused by his passing so many hours daily in the sun during his convalescence.

"I am glad to be out of Herat," Azim said, as he looked back at the walls.

"So am I, Azim. I thought at one time that I was never coming out at all."

"It is a very bad place, master. In Persia the governors squeeze the people a bit, and sometimes there is much grumbling, but the worst of them are very much better than Yar Mahomed, who is a son of Sheitan, whom may Allah confound."

"He is a scoundrel," Angus agreed heartily. "I wonder myself that the people of Herat have not long since risen and torn him to pieces. I know that if I had been a merchant there I should have tried to stir them up to do it."

Azim shook his head. "They cannot trust each other, effendi. There are many who would like to do as you have said, but there are many who cannot trust their own neighbours."

"Then I would do it myself. Look how many old men were tortured to death; some of them must have had sons. Had my father been so tortured I would have lain in wait for the wuzeer day after day in some empty house—there are plenty of them in one of the streets by which he usually went from his palace to the walls—and as he rode past I would have put a bullet in his head. I would then have escaped from the back of the house if possible. No one would have seen who had fired the shot, and I should have been safe if once away. If I were overtaken I would put a pistol to my head, so as to avoid being tortured to death. I cannot understand thirty or forty thousand people continuing to support the rule of a tyrant, when one bold man could put an end to it."

Once on his way Angus felt new life in his veins, and in a week he had entirely shaken off the feeling of lassitude that had oppressed him in the poisoned air of Herat, and felt equal to any ordinary exertion. As he had expected, he met with no difficulties whatever on his way, for on the road between Herat and Candahar the Afghans were accustomed to see Persian traders passing, and no suspicion whatever was felt that Angus and his attendant were other than they represented themselves to be. The journey was a long one, but Angus did not hurry. It was pleasant to him, after being for a year cooped up in the besieged city, to travel quietly in the fresh mountain air. The scenery was all new to him, and though Azim felt the cold a good deal, Angus enjoyed it immensely. He made short stages, and never exceeded twenty miles a day, and often, when he arrived at a village which offered fair accommodation, he was content to stay when only fourteen or fifteen had been traversed. As this was the great high-road of trade there were khans in almost every village, and there was no difficulty in purchasing the necessaries of life. Everywhere the talk was of war.

Once beyond the territory over which Shah Mahomed ruled, the news that the Persians had failed to take Herat and had retired had excited regret. It had been regarded as certain that the place would fall, and all had anticipated the march of a Persian and Russian army to Candahar, to be followed by a grand invasion of India. The mountaineers had felt sure that the army would gladly pay whatever was demanded for permission to pass unmolested; that they would be ready to pay high prices for provisions and the hire of transport animals, so that they would enrich themselves in the first place, and then have a chance of sharing in the plunder of India, and the destruction of the infidels. Angus was appealed to by all with whom he conversed to

explain how it was that the Shah with his great army had failed to take Herat. He was eagerly questioned, too, with regard to Russia, a country of which they had heard many strange rumours. Were they very strong? were they really in alliance with Persia? were they infidels? if so, how was it that the Shah was friendly with them?

To the first of these questions Angus could only reply that, not having been in the Persian camp, he was unable to give them information. There were certainly Russian generals and officers leading the Persians at the siege of Herat. They were infidels, and neighbours of the Persians. For himself, he thought that while no doubt the Shah wished to be at peace with such powerful neighbours, he would be wise not to trust them very far. He could not really wish for them to become more powerful, and if they aided him, it could only be for their own objects. As a peaceful man he himself only desired to trade, and left these matters to wiser heads. But at the same time he knew that Russia was constantly extending its dominions at the expense of its neighbours; and that, as it was a Christian country, it certainly could not be thinking of invading India for the benefit of the Mohammedans of that country, or those of Afghanistan—certainly not those of Persia. Whatever the Shah and the military officers might think, the trading classes were uneasy at the influence that Russia was gaining, and apprehensive of the growing power and proximity of a neighbour possessed of such immense forces, and of ambitious views.

Two months after leaving Herat Angus entered Candahar. The journey had been wholly without any incident of importance. The appearance of Candahar somewhat resembled that of Herat. Situated in a fertile plain, with a range of craggy hills at no great distance, and surrounded by a wall, it was incapable of offering any prolonged resistance to the

attack of a European force provided with siege artillery. The town was a comparatively modern one, being founded in 1754 on the site of an ancient city. It was built on a regular plan, the streets all crossing each other at right angles. Like Herat, it had four principal streets meeting in the centre, each of these 150 feet wide, and lined with shops. Streams of water ran down almost every street.

The town made a very favourable impression on Angus after the ruin and dirt of Herat. As a Persian he felt at home here, for Persian inscriptions and names met his eye everywhere, as throughout Afghanistan the whole of the trade is carried on by Persians or by natives of India, the Afghans themselves deeming the profession of arms the only one honourable. The upper classes among them all habitually spoke Persian; which language was generally employed in writing and in all official communications. Angus put up at a khan which he learned was frequented by traders passing through the city, and soon made the acquaintance of several merchants lodging there. From them he learned much more of the state of affairs than he had gathered in the Afghan villages he had passed through on the journey. The English were, it was said, gathering a great army in Scinde with the intention of placing Shah Soojah on the throne of Afghanistan instead of Dost Mahomed.

Of all the blunders that have been committed from the time of our first arrival in India, none is comparable, in point of injustice, hopeless blundering, or misfortune, to the policy thus inaugurated in Afghanistan. Shah Soojah was the head of the Dooranee tribe, and had been overthrown by the Barukzyes, who had gradually attained a power which the Dooranee monarch was unable to withstand. The four princes of that tribe divided the kingdom between themselves, and after waging many wars against each other Dost Mahomed, the youngest of the four brothers, became

ruler of Cabul. During these wars Peshawur had been captured by the great Sikh ruler, Runjeet Sing. In 1834 Shah Soojah made an effort to recover his kingdom, but was defeated, and again became a fugitive in British India.

Dost Mahomed, alarmed at the preparations made by the Sikhs for still further dismembering his country, and by the fact that his two brothers, who were Lords of Candahar, might at any moment take advantage of his troubles with the Sikhs to throw off his authority altogether, was anxious to enter into an alliance with the British, all the more so as he had learned of the ever-increasing influence of Russia in Persia. Lord Auckland sent Captain Burnes to Cabul; nominally his purpose was to arrange for a larger commercial intercourse between the two countries. He was received with great honour in Cabul, but he had come altogether unprovided with the customary presents, and Dost Mahomed reasonably felt this as a studied slight. Nevertheless he exerted himself to the utmost to obtain the alliance of the British. But Burnes had no authority whatever to treat with him, and could give him no assurances that aid would be forthcoming if, on the fall of Herat, which was considered certain, the Persians and Russians, aided by the Candahar chiefs, who were known to be in correspondence with them, were to invade his territory. Nor could he obtain any promise that the British would use their influence with Runjeet Sing to restore Peshawur.

Burnes saw how sincere was the desire of the Ameer for a close friendship with England, and wrote strongly to Lord Auckland in favour of an alliance with him. He pointed out that Dost Mahomed was firmly seated at Cabul, where he had reigned for ten years, that Shah Soojah had no adherents, and even if placed on the throne could not maintain himself there. Colonel Pottinger, the resident in Scinde, also gave the same advice, but Lord Auckland paid

no attention whatever to their representations. A weak man, he was guided chiefly by Mr. MacNaghten, his secretary, a comparatively young man, with great ambition and an unbounded belief in himself, but, as events proved, with few of the qualities required in a man placed in a highly responsible and difficult position in India. Burnes was instructed to insist upon the Ameer's binding himself to make no alliances whatever without the consent of England, and at the same time he was to refuse to give any pledges in return for such a concession.

A more preposterous demand was never made upon an independent sovereign. For a long time the Ameer strove in vain to obtain some sort of conditions, and at length, finding this hopeless, he threw himself into the arms of the Russian agent, whom he had hitherto treated with great coldness. Burnes's position became intolerable, and he was recalled; and Lord Auckland at once prepared to place Shah Soojah on the throne by force. Runjeet Sing was asked to join in the undertaking, and at a great durbar held in the Punjaub, the conditions were arranged, under which Shah Soojah was to pay a large amount to Runjeet as well as to the British for the aid they were to give him. As if it was not enough to have united all Afghanistan against us, the people of Scinde, who had hitherto been on good terms with us, were treated as if they were enemies. They were ordered to furnish provisions and carriage for the army, and to pay large sums of money, although they had, by the terms of a treaty with us, been guaranteed against any claim whatever for money or services. It would seem, indeed, that Lord Auckland and Mr. MacNaghten had neglected no step whatever that could ensure the failure of their enterprise. When, after the war, the papers relating to the policy that had occasioned it were published in the form of a blue-book, it is significant that the passages in the

letters of Burnes and Pottinger remonstrating against the course proposed by Lord Auckland were suppressed, dishonesty being thus added to the terrible blunders of the weakest and most obstinate of the governor-generals of India —blunders that caused not only the utter destruction of a British army, but led to an almost equally unjust war for the conquest of Scinde.

As far as Angus could learn the Candahar princes were making no preparations whatever to take part in the war. The general idea was that they would gladly see Dost Mahomed overthrown and Shah Soojah placed on the throne, feeling certain that the latter would not be able to retain his position, and that they would have a far better chance of becoming masters of the whole of Afghanistan then than they could have so long as their brother remained on the throne. Three days after his arrival an officer from the palace called upon Angus and requested him to accompany him there, as the princes wished to question him as to the reasons for the Persians retiring from before Herat. On arriving at the palace he was shown into a small chamber, where Kihur-el-Khan, with two of his brothers, was sitting.

"I have heard that you have arrived here, and that you passed by Herat just as your Shah had left with his army."

"That is so, Prince," Angus said, bowing deeply.

"You have come hither for purposes of trade? From what city do you come?"

"From Tabriz. I represent one of the largest merchants there." And he mentioned the name of a well-known trader. "When I left it was considered certain that Herat would speedily be captured, and that the Shah would move forward here, having, it was said, entered into an alliance with you. 'Therefore,' my patron said to me, 'go you to Candahar. Doubtless, in future, trade with Northern India will go by that route instead of by sea, and Candahar will be a mighty

centre of trade. Therefore go and see for yourself what are the prospects, and the price at which goods can be carried from the present frontier to that city and thence into Scinde. Find out for me whether there are any hindrances to trade along the road, what are the charges for permission to travel through the passes held by various tribes, and the disposition of the people towards traders.'"

"How was it that you did not turn back when you found that your army was retiring without having captured Herat?"

"I thought it best still to go on as I had come so far," Angus replied. "The Shah, it is true, was retiring, but he might return in the spring; and I could not doubt that with your powerful friendship he would the next time succeed, and the information that I should gain would enable my patron to send off without delay a large caravan of merchandise if he found it expedient to do so."

"Were you in the Persian camp?"

"No, your highness. An army when it is retiring is best avoided by peaceful men. When all goes well the camp officers see that traders are not meddled with by the soldiers, but when things are not going favourably and there is discontent in camp, discipline is relaxed, and it is useless for those who are robbed or maltreated to make complaints."

"That is no doubt true, but doubtless you heard a good deal from those who have been in the camp. How did men say it was that they failed to capture Herat, which is but a weak town?"

"Some say one thing and some another, your highness. Some declare that had it not been for a British officer who happened to be there the place would have fallen in a very short time. Others say that it could have been taken easily had all the Persian generals been of one mind, but that

each acted for himself, and that only once did all attack at the same time."

The Prince nodded. He had seen very many times the evil of divided counsels, and knew how necessary it was that there should be a strong leader who could make himself obeyed by all.

"And what do people say about the Russians? We know that they had officers there. We hear that they are a great people, and are good friends with Persians."

"Opinions are divided, Prince. There are those who believe that their friendship will indeed be a great advantage to Persia. There are others, especially among the trading class, who think otherwise, and believe that Russia is too strong to be a real friend, and that it would be far better to maintain a close alliance with England, which would support them against Russia, and which lies so far away across the seas that it could gain nothing by meddling in her affairs or taking her territory."

"But it is reported that it is the English who have now interfered and have saved Herat, and are sending a fleet and an army to compel Persia to desist."

"That is what was reported and generally believed, Prince, but I cannot say how truly; I merely heard the common talk on the way."

"But why should England have interfered? What does it matter to them whether Herat belongs to Persia or to the Suddozye, Prince Kamran."

"According to the opinion of the traders in Tabriz, England would not have cared at all had Persia been strong and been fighting only for the conquest of Herat, but it was known that England regards with great jealousy the approach of Russia to India, and considers that as Persia was certainly acting under the influence of Russia, it was the

latter who would be the real masters of Herat, and not the Persians. Then, too, it was said—though we know that rumour often lies—that Russia and Persia had many friends in Afghanistan, and that the conquest of Herat would only be the first step to further advances south."

Kihur-el-Khan frowned. Such an undertaking had certainly been made by him and his brothers, but the retreat of the Persians from Herat at the dictation of the English, and the fact that the latter were now gathering an army with the avowed purpose of placing Shah Soojah on the throne of Afghanistan, gravely altered the position. They had no love for their brother, and had a British force advanced through the Khyber passes to Cabul, and placed Shah Soojah on the throne, they would certainly have rendered no assistance to Dost Mahomed, for they felt sure that Soojah would not be able to maintain himself, and saw that there was a good chance that in the confusion which would prevail, they themselves might obtain the mastery of Cabul. But as the English army was evidently intending to advance through the Bolan Pass, it would probably in the first place march on Candahar, and they themselves would, in consequence of their intrigues with Persia and Russia, be regarded as enemies. He was therefore silent for a minute or two, and then said: "If the Shah has retired because he is afraid of the English, he will not venture to send another army to aid us against them."

"I do not think that he could do so. His army suffered very heavily."

"I hear that you speak the language of our country. How is that?" the Afghan asked suddenly.

"I do not speak it well, your highness," replied Angus, who had thought is possible that this question might be asked him. "Having known for some time that I should make this journey hither, I studied for a time with a slave who

had been bought by a merchant of my employer's acquaintance, who had himself bought him from the Turkomans in a journey that he made in their country. But I speak it only well enough to make my way through the country, and to obtain such necessaries as may be required on the journey, and to converse in some fashion with such travellers as I might meet on the road or in the khans."

"It was reported to me that you spoke so that all could understand you," he said. "It was this that seemed strange to me that you, a Persian, should speak Pushtoo. I will speak to you further another day."

As Angus returned to the khan, he felt that he was an object of suspicion. Up to the point when the Prince had sharply and suddenly asked how he came to speak Pushtoo, his bland manner had led him to believe that he had been simply desirous of obtaining the last news from the frontier. But this showed him unmistakably that the Prince had learned something which had excited his suspicions that he was there either as an emissary from Kamran, or of Russia or Persia, desirous of ascertaining the position of affairs at Candahar, the forces at the disposal of the princes, and the feeling among the people in general with reference to a protectorate, or occupation by one or other of those powers. Angus knew the naturally suspicious character of Eastern princes. In Persia no one ever ventured to discuss any public affairs openly. In Herat, hated as Kamran and Yar Mahomed were, no one dared breathe a word of aught but adulation, for the slightest suspicion of disloyalty sufficed to bring about the ruin and death of the unfortunate man on whom it fell.

The last words of the Prince were in fact a sentence of imprisonment to the city for an indefinite time. The Prince might not send for him again for months. But the mere intimation that he would do so was sufficient. He could not

continue his journey without running the risk of being pursued and brought back again, in which case he might first be tortured to extract any secret he might possess, and then be put to death. He might, for aught he knew, be already spied upon, and everything that he said or did reported. Consequently, when he reached the khan, he took care to evince no appearance of thoughtfulness or uneasiness, but chatted with the traders there upon commercial matters, respecting the advantages of Cabul and Candahar as trading centres, the amount of the taxes laid upon goods in the two cities, and other topics that would naturally be of interest to a merchant intending to establish himself in Afghanistan.

He was under no uneasiness as to Azim. He had instructed him carefully in the account he should give of himself, the city from which he came, the merchants whose agent he was, the route he had followed, and other similar matters, so that their stories should correspond in all respects. When all had lain down for the night, Angus was able to think over quietly what was to be done. As to remaining where he was, it was clearly out of the question. For aught he knew, the British force said to be gathering to advance on Cabul might be months before it was put in motion, or the expedition might be abandoned altogether. Even if the advance was made, it might not pass through Candahar, and he might be detained in that city for an indefinite time. It was evident, therefore, that he must somehow escape. The question was how this could be managed. What disguise could he adopt, and how could he evade the vigilance of those who were watching him? The matter was rendered all the more difficult by the fact that there were practically but two roads open to him, that through the Kojak Pass to Quettah, and that to the north-east through Kelat-i-Ghilzye and Ghuznee to Cabul. If he moved off either of these regular lines of

traffic he would be unable to give any reason for his divergence, and in any case would be subject to plunder. Even on these roads it was only as a travelling merchant he would be respected, and as a travelling merchant he would be quickly overtaken by the Prince's followers.

Think as he would, no plan occurred to him, and he at last went to sleep determining to consult Azim, in whose sharpness he had much faith. In the morning, accordingly, as soon as he was up, he sauntered across the yard to where the boy was watching the horses feed, and preventing other less fortunate animals from robbing them.

"Azim," he said, "the Princes have their suspicions of me, and have as much as ordered me not to leave the town; try and think over some manner in which we may get away, and if overtaken may not be recognized. I do not wish to talk with you now, because for aught we know a spy may be at present watching us, but at mid-day I will come out and speak to you again. In the meantime think it over. Now, when the horses have done feeding, take your basket, go into the bazaar, and buy food for our dinner, so that anyone who may be watching us may suppose that I have merely been giving you orders what to purchase."

He then went out into the town, and spent the morning looking into the shops, and asking questions as to the prices of the goods, so that he might appear to be ascertaining what profits would be made. He also went to several shops which happened to be untenanted, asked the rent, and made enquiries about the accommodation. At dinner-time he went over to where Azim was squatting, attending to two earthenware pots that were simmering over a small charcoal fire, which he was fanning to keep it going.

"I can think of nothing, master."

"Then to-night, Azim, after everyone is asleep, get up quietly and go round to the back of the khan. I will join

you there, and we will talk it over together. Do not be surprised if I keep you waiting some time. Some of these people may sit up late talking. I cannot move till all are asleep. It is quite possible that someone who is lodging at the khan may be watching us."

It was indeed late before the talk ceased and all lay down to sleep. Angus waited for another hour and then got up quietly and went out. Two minutes later he joined Azim.

"Well, lad, have you thought of any plan yet?"

"Nothing, master; unless we leave our animals and goods behind us."

"That we could do," Angus said. "I can get rid of the goods to-morrow. Why leave the animals?'

"Because, sir, they will be looking for a man with a fair complexion, and a boy, mounted on horses."

"That is so; but if we left the horses behind us and walked it would be just as bad."

"I did not think of walking, master. I thought that perhaps you might buy a camel and go on that."

"That would be better certainly, Azim. We might both darken our faces, and in my Afghan dress might make our way easily enough, if it were not that we should be hotly pursued, and then a man and boy, however they were dressed, or however they were travelling, would be sure to be closely examined. I have it!" he said after a pause. "You might go as a woman; well wrapped up, little more than your eyes would be seen. You might ride on the camel, and I might lead it. In that way we might pass as natives of some village among the hills. The first difficulty, however, is how to buy a camel. I have my Afghan dress, and, if I were sure that I was not watched, could get to some quiet spot, change my Persian dress for it, and go boldly into a shop and buy a woman's clothes for you; I could then go down into the quarter where the tribesmen encamp and buy a camel. But

if I were caught doing so, it would be almost proof positive that I was going to try to leave the city, and in that case I should no doubt be arrested and thrown into prison at once."

"We might steal one," Azim suggested. "There are many always grazing outside the wall while their masters are here doing their business."

"Yes, but they have not saddles. However, I will think it over, Azim. Your idea about having a camel has certainly shown me a way in which we can get away if it is managed well, and I ought to be able to find some plan by which we can carry it out. It is of no use talking any longer over it, there is no hurry for a day or two; and the longer I appear to be really engaged in looking for a place of business, the more careless the watch may become."

Angus did not go to sleep that night, but thinking the situation over in every way decided that the first step to be taken was to ascertain for certain whether they were watched. If they were not, the matter would be comparatively easy, but if his every movement were followed, he could see no way out of the difficulty. When he paid his usual visit to Azim in the morning, he said: "I want to find out if I am followed. I will walk straight along this street towards the southern gate. When I get to the last turning to the left, I will turn up it; then I shall be out of the crowd. Do you keep a good long way behind me. I shall go on for some distance, and then mount the wall and walk along there, looking over the country. I want you to observe if any man follows me. You must be so far off that even if he looks round he will not recognize you. I don't want you to find out this time who he is, we can do that later on; I only want to know if I am followed. Each time I turn a corner he is likely to look round before he turns, so when you see him getting near a corner that I have turned, hide yourself if you can."

"I understand, master."

Accordingly, when half an hour later Angus came out, the lad waited for a time, and then followed him. His master was out of sight, and Azim walked quickly till he saw him looking as usual into one of the shops, and then dropped behind again and followed slowly until Angus turned off the street that he had named. Azim walked still more slowly, and on reaching the corner saw him a considerable distance ahead. There were but a few people about, for beyond the four principal streets were many large open spaces dotted here and there with ruined walls of houses that had stood there at the time when the city was far more populous than it was at present. Angus was walking at a steady pace, as if he had some definite object in view, and of the various people in sight only one, who was about half way between him and Azim, was walking at anything like the same rate. A hundred yards farther Angus turned to the right. Azim kept on until he saw the man he was watching was close to that point; he then stepped aside into an empty piece of ground between two houses. Half a minute later he looked out; the man was no longer visible. He walked on fast until he reached the corner, and saw the man again turn off after Angus. They were near the wall now, and the boy went forward with greater caution than before. When he got to where he had last seen his master, he caught sight of him on the wall some fifty yards away. The man who had been following him had stopped at a low wall, and over it was watching Angus furtively. That settled the point, and Azim at once returned to the khan. It was an hour later before Angus came in. He did not pay any attention to Azim, but went in and engaged in talk as usual with some of the occupants. It was an hour before he came out to the yard.

"Well, lad?" he asked.

"You were watched, master. A man followed you all the

way, and hid behind a wall to watch you when you went on the wall. I thought at the time that I might have crept up to him and stabbed him if I had wanted to, but of course I would not without your orders."

"No, that would not have done at all till we are ready to go; and I don't like stabbing anyhow. Still, I will think it over. Come round again to the same meeting-place to-night; by that time I shall have decided what to do.

CHAPTER VI

AN ESCAPE

"I THINK, Azim," Angus said, when they met that night "you must buy some clothes for yourself. You may be pretty sure that no one is watching you. You must not get them at any shop in the main street, because there are always passers-by who stop and listen to the bargains made; but there are some by-streets where there are a few shops. Of course you will go into a Persian's. If you give a fair price—not too high, you know, so as to seem too anxious to buy—I don't suppose he will trouble much what you may want them for. You must make out some likely story—say, for example, that your master keeps a sharp look-out over you, and that you want to be able to go out sometimes in such a dress that he would not know you if he met you. I don't know that that is a good excuse, but I am unable to think of a better one. All you will want will be a long white robe coming over the head and down to the eye-brows, and falling to the feet; and a white cloth coming across the face below the eyes, and falling down over the throat. There is no occasion to buy other garments. A rug torn asunder and wrapped round the waist,

falling to the feet, so as to fill up the outside robe, is all that will be required. But the more I think of it, Azim, the greater appears the difficulty about the camel; indeed, now that we have ascertained about this spy, it seems to me hardly possible to make a start without being pursued at once."

Azim nodded approvingly. "That is just what I think, master. But I could put a knife into him, and then all trouble would be over."

"I don't like the idea of killing the man, Azim."

"You killed many men at Herat."

"That was in battle, which is a very different thing from stabbing a man to enable us to get away."

Azim shook his head. This was quite beyond him. "He is fighting against you now, master. If the princes find out that you are English they will put you in a dungeon and most likely kill you, and kill me too, so as to shut my mouth. This man is paid to act as a spy on you. Why not kill him? Thousands of people were killed or died at Herat. I cannot understand why one man should not be killed, when we can perhaps get free away if he is dead."

"If he found us escaping and attacked us, we could kill him, Azim, but it is not an Englishman's way to kill men, except in fight."

Azim shook his head. To his mind this was very foolish.

"Perhaps we might make him prisoner, Azim."

"Where could we put him in prison?" Azim enquired, with his eyes wide open in surprise.

"I don't mean in a prison, Azim, I mean in some empty house or some out-of-the-way place; we might tie his arms and legs and gag him."

Azim's eyes twinkled. "I see, master, you do not like to use a knife. Good, we can bind and hide him. Perhaps no one would come for a long time, may be a year, and, finding

only a skeleton, would not bother about him. He would just say it was some fellow killed by robbers."

"No, no, Azim," Angus said in a tone of horror. "I never thought of such a thing. No doubt someone would come along and let him out."

"Someone might come, master. He might come a few minutes after we had gone, then they would catch us at once. If someone did not come in an hour, why should he come in a week or a month?"

Angus was silent. "No, Azim, you don't quite understand me. I meant that he should be gagged and bound after dark, and then be left in some place a little distance from the road, where he would not be seen till morning. Then the first person who came along would turn aside and look at him, and he would be loosed, but we should have got twelve hours' start."

"That would be a good plan, master. But how should we get the camel?"

"In that case we should make a start without it, for we might ride fifty miles, perhaps a good deal more than that, before it would be discovered that we had gone. We could do that in our present dress, and then I could put on my Afghan clothes and go into a village off the road and say that the horses were tired and that I wanted to go on, and so buy a camel."

Azim shook his head. "Anyone who wanted to go on fast, master, would not buy a camel."

Angus uttered an exclamation of disgust, and Azim struck another blow at his plan by saying, "How would you get the horses out, master? The gates are shut at dark. You could not tie up the spy till after the gates were shut, and in the morning he might be found, and we should be caught as we went out."

"I am getting altogether stupid," Angus said. "Of course you are right; the horses could not be sent out beforehand, for if the spy saw them going out he would at once inform his employers, and I should be arrested. Ah, I have an idea! That trader from Scinde, who arrived here yesterday, was saying that as he intended to stay here for some time he would sell his horses if he could get a fair price for them. I might say that I would buy two of them, as they are better than mine, and as I wanted to travel fast, I would give him my two and some money for them. I dare say he would be willing to do that, as our horses would sell more easily than his. One can always sell a poor horse, while one might have to wait some time before finding a purchaser for a good one. I don't suppose really there is much difference in value between his and mine, and he would think he was making a good bargain. I should say that for certain reasons, which it would not be necessary to explain to him, it must be a part of the bargain that he should deliver them outside the city, and that one of his men should take them out during the day and wait for us at a spot we could agree upon."

"That would be a capital plan, master."

"Then we will carry it out, Azim."

"Shall I get the woman's dress?"

"Yes, you may as well do that. We may want all sorts of disguises before we get down. We need not talk any longer now; at any rate we certainly shall not try the plan to-morrow. We must not appear in any hurry with the trader, and there are several things we shall have to talk over when I have struck a bargain with him."

The next night Angus was able to inform his follower that he had made his arrangements with the Scinde trader. "I am to buy his horses," he said, "and he will deliver them in the way I want. Without saying it, he evidently understood that I wanted to get quietly out of the city to escape

some trouble. He asked a very reasonable price, but he would have nothing to do with my horses. He said that if there should be any trouble about my leaving, the change of horses might be noticed. If he said he had bought them of me, and sold me two of his, he might get into trouble too. However, I afterwards talked to one of the other merchants, who was going away in a day or two, and told him that I might be kept here for a considerable time, and should therefore be glad to get rid of my horses. He said he would be glad to buy them, as he was taking down a number of Heratee carpets and other things. So we struck a bargain at once, and he paid me the money and I gave him the receipt.

"I said that you would continue to look after the horses as usual until we started, so that matter is quite arranged. The Scinde man will keep the horses I have bought with his others till he sends them out through the gate. When he does so, he will put our saddles on them. Now for our plans to-morrow. I shall go out as usual in the morning; the spy will of course follow me. While I am away make up our rugs and disguises and fasten them upon the saddles, and take these to the new horses, so that the trader's servant will put them on with the saddles and take them out with the horses before sunset. He is to stop at those three palm-trees that grow by the roadside a quarter of a mile out of the town. Even if the spy is looking on as they go out of the yard, he will have no idea that I have anything to do with the horses.

"When you have seen to that, you will buy twenty yards of rope for us to get down over the wall. I shall start at about four o'clock. I shall go exactly the same way as I did the last time you followed me. It is a very lonely part there. He is sure to watch me very closely, as he will wonder why I choose that way for my walks. I shall stay there

for a bit, and shall lean over the wall as if I were calculating its depth and intended to make my escape there. He is sure to be intent on watching my movements, and will get up as close as he can. Then is your time to steal up. Do you think that you can do it without his hearing you? If not, I should think that a better plan will be for you to hide close to the way we shall come back. I shall not return till it is beginning to get dark, and he will probably keep closer to me than he would going, so as to better watch my movements. When he comes along you will spring out and knock him down, and I will, as you shout, run back to your assistance."

"I shall not want any assistance, master," Azim said confidently. "I am sure I am quite as strong as he is, and as I shall take him by surprise I shall have no difficulty in managing him."

"Don't use your sword, Azim."

"No, master, I will get a thick stick."

"Of course you will bring the rope with you, Azim; the twenty yards will be ample to spare a length to tie him up with, and to reach to the ground from the top of the wall. You may as well put enough food for a couple of days in the saddle-bags, and a supply of grain for the horses, then we shall not have to stop to buy anything."

The day passed quietly. Azim bought the heaviest staff that he could find, and brought it back and stowed it away during his master's absence, as he did not think that the latter would approve of its weight. He considered his master's objection to his stabbing the spy to be a weakness which he was quite unable to understand. At four o'clock Angus started, and a few minutes later the trader's servant led the two horses he had bought through the streets and out at the southern gate. Azim waited till he saw him go, as there was no occasion for him to follow the spy closely,

and indeed it had been arranged that he should not do so, lest the spy should this time notice him and perhaps take alarm. He therefore strolled leisurely along until he neared the spot where Angus was standing on the wall. The spy had taken up his post nearer to him than before, and was evidently watching narrowly what he was doing. As he might turn round suddenly, Azim seated himself behind a ruined hut within a couple of yards of the road, and there patiently waited until, as darkness fell, Angus came along.

"I am here, master," Azim said.

"Take care of yourself," Angus replied without stopping; "he will probably have pistols, and certainly a knife."

"All right, master."

Azim stood up now grasping the heavy staff firmly in both hands. Listening intently he heard a minute later a soft footstep, and the spy passed him keeping his eye fixedly on the figure ahead of him. Azim sprang out, and swinging his staff round his head, brought it with all his strength against the back of the man's head, just below his turban. He fell without a sound.

"He is down, master," the lad cried.

Angus, who had been listening for the sound of a struggle and had heard the blow, came running back.

"Why, it was almost like the sound of a pistol," he said, as he saw the motionless figure.

"Yes, master, I was obliged to hit him hard, because, as you said, he might have pistols."

"You have stunned him," Angus went on, going up to the prostrate figure. "Now, cut off a length of that rope and we will tie him up securely."

He tied the man's legs, and then turned him over. The inertness of the body struck him, and he placed his ear over his heart. "He is dead," he said. "He is not breathing, and his heart is not beating. You have hit him too hard."

"Well, I did hit him hard, master. It is a misfortune, but perhaps it is all for the best. Undoubtedly it was Allah's will that he should die."

"Well, it cannot be helped," Angus said, "and undoubtedly it will make it safer for us. Well, let us move on."

"Do you go on, master, and I will take his clothes off and drag him into this hut. He may lie there for months before anyone comes along and looks in."

"Very well, I will walk on to the wall; don't be long."

Five minutes later Azim rejoined him carrying a bundle.

"We do not want to be bothered with the clothes," Angus said.

"No, master; but if we left them there, they might be found to-morrow morning. Someone might recognize the man by them, so I thought it would be better to carry them away with us for a few miles, and then throw them in some bushes. I have got his pistols and knife. He was well paid, master; he had ten gold pieces in his sash—here they are."

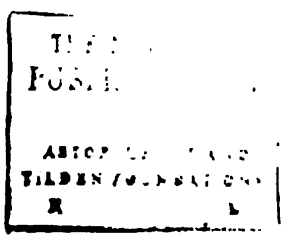
"Put them in your own pocket, Azim. I do not want to have anything to do with them; they are your spoil."

Azim, who had no compunction in the matter, at once put the little bag into his sash. The rope was now fastened to the battlement, and they slid down. The wall was about forty feet high, and unprovided with a moat. They started at once for the place where the horses were to be waiting for them; a quarter of an hour's brisk walk took them there. Angus made a present to the man in charge of them, who, while they were tightening the girths, at once wrapped himself in the blanket he had brought out and lay down to sleep till morning.

"We need not press the horses," Angus said as they rode off. "We shall certainly have twelve hours' start, and I hope twenty-four. It all depends on how often the man reports to his employer, who is no doubt an official at the palace.



AZIM SURPRISES THE SPY.


TILDEN

Probably he goes once a day, though, as there has been nothing suspicious about our movements and no signs of any intention of leaving, he may have been ordered to go only every two or three days unless he has news to give. Of course in that case we are all right; but if he reports every evening, how long a start we shall get depends entirely upon what sort of a man the official is. In any case, he would hardly give a thought to his spy not coming in this evening, but would suppose that I had been out till late. When he does not appear in the morning, if the official is of a suspicious nature he will enquire for the man, and when he is not found will send down to the khan to see if he is there, and to ascertain if things are going on as usual.

"When the news is brought him that the man is not there, and that we have been out all night, he will become alarmed. He will go himself and question the traders there, and will doubtless ascertain that I have sold our horses. I don't suppose he will hear that we have bought others. The trader will see that there is going to be trouble about it, and is likely to hold his tongue and tell his servant to be silent on the subject; and as the official could have no reason for imagining that we should sell our horses and buy others, he will conclude that we have made our escape over the wall on foot. That is the report which he will probably make to the Prince, and we may safely calculate that it will be afternoon before parties of horse are sent off in pursuit by the Herat, Ghuznee, and Quettah roads, and will probably be instructed to enquire for two young Persians on foot. They will lose time by stopping at every village to make enquiries, and after going forty or fifty miles will begin to feel sure that we have not come along that road, but have gone by one of the others, or perhaps hidden up in some village at a distance from the road.

"They may have instructions to go as far as Quettah; but

suppose they get thirty miles before sunset—and they certainly won't get farther than that, as they will have to make enquiries, and will probably halt as soon as it gets dark,—we shall have a start of nearly sixty miles before morning, and will hide up and go on as soon as it is dark, and shall be another thirty or forty before they start next day; so we shall then be some sixty miles ahead of them and within from twenty to thirty from Quettah. We will skirt round the town without going into it, and then make down the Bolan Pass. I don't think there is the least chance of any pursuit being kept up beyond Quettah, and we can travel at our own pace down the pass. We shall have to lay in a good stock of provisions at the last village we pass before beginning to descend, and must travel at night, for otherwise we may be plundered by the tribesmen, who have the worst possible reputation."

"How long is the pass, master?"

"Fifty-five miles long, Mr. Pottinger told me. He says that it is a frightful place. A river runs through it, and in the wet season anyone caught in it would be drowned, for in some places the sides are perpendicular, and the channel is only sixty or seventy feet wide. There are caves along there in which the tribesmen hide, and rush out and plunder, and often kill, travellers. We must get through in two nights, and must be extremely careful where we stop for the day, choosing some place where we can hide ourselves and our horses."

"Well, master," Azim said after a pause, "if it is the will of Allah that we are to get through, we shall; if not, not."

"That is it, Azim. I do not think that there is much fear of our lives. We know that travellers do use that pass. I believe they generally pay so much to one of the chiefs of the tribesmen, and we will do the same if, on arriving

at the top of the pass, we find that we can arrange it. We shall want money to take us from Dadur across the plain to the Indus. It is a barren and desolate country, and we shall have to buy some supplies at Dadur. Coming down without merchandise, the tribesmen will make sure that we have money, as we should naturally have sold the goods we brought from Persia at Candahar, and must intend buying a fresh stock in India. Therefore, you may be sure, that if captured we should be stripped of every penny we have about us."

They rode for eight hours, and reckoned that they had made some fifty miles. They gave the horses a good feed and lay down until daylight, for they were now at the foot of the Kojuk, a gorge so steep and difficult that it could not be passed at night. Just as they were starting, three tribesmen rode up, and in the name of the local chief demanded two gold tomauns, one for each horse and rider, as tribute for a free passage. As the money was paid without question, they rode off without giving further trouble. The passage was long and difficult, and in many cases they had to lead their horses. Once through, they allowed the animals another hour's rest and a feed, and then mounting, rode on briskly again. A few miles farther on they halted in a clump of trees, and slept until nightfall, and then rode another twenty miles. As speed was of less consequence than keeping their horses in fair condition, they turned off at a little stream, followed it for half a mile up, and then halted in a dip through which it ran. Here there was good grass for the horses. They remained for the rest of that day, and until within three hours of daybreak next morning. As Angus had calculated, they saw at sunrise the mud fort and town of Quettah standing on its rocky eminence. They made a detour, and came down upon the road again round the town, and then rode briskly down the Shawl valley. The

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country round was rich and fertile, and dotted with villages, orchards, and vineyards. They stopped late in the afternoon at a village near the entrance to the pass. Two armed men came out from a hut as they drew up. The leader said, "Our chief is master of the pass, travellers find it wise to pay for right of passage."

"That we are ready to do," Angus said. "But does your chief guarantee that we shall go unmolested down to Dadur?"

"The chief cannot guarantee that, he can only guarantee you from hurt or damage from his people. He is lord of the eastern side of the pass, but there are others—men of no account, and who own no chief—among the mountains to the west. They sometimes waylay travellers. Our chief punishes them when he can do so; but it is seldom that he is able to catch them. He does all that he can, for he wishes well to traders and others who pass along, for when ill happens to them others are afraid to pass, and he loses his tribute. When a large caravan comes up, and is able to pay handsomely, he furnishes an escort of twenty men or more; but he will not send less than twenty, for a smaller party might not be able to defend the caravan, and he would suffer loss of honour from failing to give protection to those to whom he guaranteed it."

"We cannot afford to pay for an escort of twenty men, and have but little to be robbed of, for you see we carry no merchandise, having disposed of what we bought at Herat and Candahar, and sent the proceeds by sure hands back to Persia."

As their attire gave no signs of their being men of substance, the tribesman said: "In that case you will only have to pay one tomaun each; that is the price for a man and horse, and the same for each camel- or horse-load of goods; that is the regular toll."

"That we can pay. As to the brigands you speak of, we must take our chance."

He handed the money to the man, who in return gave him a little white-and-red flag, which he was to show should he encounter any of his tribesmen. They stopped here all day, and purchased food for their journey.

"I should think it would be a very good thing, Azim," Angus said in the afternoon, "if we could engage a guide. We might break our necks making our way down here in the dark. I will speak to those two fellows. I suppose they are on duty here, and cannot go themselves, but there may be others of the tribe in the village; or, if not, some of the people here may be accustomed to going down the pass with caravans."

Angus went to the hut occupied by the two tribesmen and called them out. "We are intending to travel at night," he said, after offering them a packet of tobacco. "In that way we may escape being seen by these brigands,"

"It will be almost impossible for you to go at night—quite impossible without a guide."

"That is what we came to you about. Are there any of your tribe who would act as a guide for us? How long would it take us?"

"It would take you four nights' journey. You could do it in two stages if your horses are sure-footed and you travelled in the day, but at night it would take four at least. How much would you be willing to pay?"

"How much would be charged?" Angus said quietly.

"You should have two men," the man answered, "two men who know the pass well. Yakoob and I could go with you. We have been here six days, and two others will come to take our places and collect tolls to-morrow, so we shall be free. We know every foot of the pass, having travelled up and down it scores of times. We cannot guarantee your

safety, but you would have a better chance with us than with others. We will take you into Dadur. We do not promise to fight; when twenty attack four, fighting is foolish. We have our horses; there are parts where the pass opens out and the bottom is level."

"Well, how much would you charge?"

The two men talked together in an undertone, and then the one who had before spoken turned again to Angus. "We would take you for three gold pieces each."

"It is a large sum," Angus said; "but as I hear in the village that it is not safe to go unless with a large caravan, and that it might be three weeks or a month before a sufficiently large number of travellers arrive, we will pay you that."

"It is a bargain, then," the man said. "We had best start at four o'clock; the descent here is very steep, and it is not overlooked from the hills to the west. Therefore, we can go down there by daylight, and then rest our horses for an hour and move forward again when it is quite dark. You had better buy four black blankets, to cut up and tie round the horses' feet, so that when we are passing the bad points, where the brigands generally lurk, no noise will be made in climbing over the boulders or slipping on smooth rocks. It will be necessary, of course, to get food for us all and for the horses."

"I will buy that to-morrow," Angus said. "I suppose it would be of no use taking torches?"

"You might take some," the man said. "In some places the rocks are so steep that no one could look down from above, and at these points there are no caves where the thieves would be hiding, and we should certainly get on a good deal faster with torches."

"I will take some then. Have you ever been through by night before?"

The man shook his head. "We have not. It is seldom attempted; but it is because you are willing to travel so that we are ready to accompany you, for the brigands would expect no one at that time, and will most likely be asleep."

"Then, if we are attacked we must be taken prisoners?"

"No," the man said; "there are many places where the hills can be ascended by men who know them. Should we be attacked near one of these spots we must leave our horses and fly; that is what we should do, and what I should advise you to do also. A man's life is worth more than a horse and saddle. Of course in the daytime there would be no escape in that way, for they would bring us down with their matchlocks; but at night we could elude them, and if they did follow us we could defend ourselves, taking shelter and shooting them as they came up."

"Well, it is a satisfaction, anyhow," Angus said, "that there would be a chance for us. Our horses are good beasts, but we value our lives more."

"I think they are honest fellows," he went on after telling Azim the substance of his conversation with the tribesmen. "They say that the Afghans have a treacherous disposition, but I believe these men can be trusted to keep their engagements. They did not exaggerate the difficulties of the journey as some would have done, nor did they pretend that they would join in a hopeless fight. In fact, although of course the actual difficulties of the journey would be very much greater in the dark than in daylight, they evidently considered that the danger from the other tribesmen would be by no means great."

It was, however, a terrible journey, and Augus felt that without the guidance of the tribesmen it would have been an impossible one. They knew exactly where the river was fordable, and on which side the pass was most free from great boulders and obstruction, and where torches could be

safely used. But at times progress was terribly slow, their horses having to pick their way among rocks and boulders, and taking more than an hour to cover a mile. At other times they were able to go at a brisk walk, and even break into a trot. Whenever they neared spots where the caves frequented by the robbers were situated, the horses' feet were muffled, and they were led with the greatest care. It was indeed comparatively seldom that the riders mounted; where it was dangerous to have torches, they walked along by the side of their horses, allowing the animals to pick their own way, which they were able to do better than they could have done if led.

The horses Angus had bought having made the ascent of the pass were to some extent accustomed to the work, and not having to carry the weight of the riders were able, save in exceptional places, to get along more easily than Angus and Azim were able to do. Both of these had many falls, and would have had many more had not their guides at such times stood close beside them and rendered them assistance, often warning them of obstacles of which they themselves were unable to make out the faintest outline.

Several times they saw the glow of fires burning in the caverns. At such points the strictest silence was observed. They had purchased Afghan shoes at the village, and round these had wound strips of thick woollen stuff like felt, so that their steps were as noiseless as those of the horses. The stirrups were fastened over the animals' backs so as to avoid contact with rocks; and any slight sound that might be made was to a great extent drowned by the murmur and rattle of the rapid stream.

The long halts during the daytime were made at points, carefully chosen by the guides, at the foot of precipitous rocks. Fragments that had fallen from above formed a bank at a short distance from the foot, the greater part of

the rocks having bounded outwards with the impetus of their fall. Between the bank and the cliff there was a depression partly filled with splinters of rock. It was, however, considerably lower than the bank, and the men and horses stationed in it were hid alike from observation from above and from the eye of those passing along the valley. Here they slept on beds composed of their saddles and rugs laid on the rough stones, their guides by turn keeping watch. As a whole they got on faster than the guides had anticipated, and were fairly down at the mouth of the pass at daybreak on the fourth morning after their start. Here the tribesmen received their pay, Angus adding another pound to the amount agreed on, for the care and assistance given. They waited two days at Dadur to allow their horses rest. Here they were fortunate in finding two men well acquainted with the road. They had so far guided a party who were proceeding up the pass to Quettah, and as they were now returning, were glad enough to accept the offer of a couple of pounds to act as guides across the desert. In accordance with their advice two rough ponies were bought to carry water-skins and provisions, while smaller skins were to be taken on their own horses, as the country to be traversed was for a considerable distance a waterless desert. Even this part of the journey would not be accomplished without danger, for the Belooches of the district were to a man plunderers, and cared nothing for the authority of the Khan of Khelat. The distance from Dadur to Shikarpore is nearly a hundred and fifty miles across a flat and dreary country, almost unpopulated; but as they were unencumbered by baggage, and carried sufficient water for their wants and those of their horses, it was performed in seven days. At Rojhan they came upon Captain Thompson, who was in command of a party which had gone forward to examine the state of the water-supply, and if necessary to sink more wells. He was surprised when

a young Persian trader addressed him in English, and informed him that he had just come through from Herat. This was quite enough to assure a warm welcome, and the officer put him up for the night in his own tent and made him in all respects comfortable.

After hearing something of the siege of Herat, and of his journey, he asked anxiously as to the water-supply in the villages on the way to Dadur. On hearing that few of them were much better supplied than Rojhan he threw up his hands in despair.

"Two or three thousand natives ought to have been engaged," he said, "and a couple of hundred set to work to dig deep wells in these villages. A hundred wells would be little enough for the army, its horses and baggage animals, and its native followers. Even when they are dug the water runs into them slowly. I have sent down my report from here. There are only three wells, one of which Sir Alexander Burnes sank when he was here a week ago; the others contain such bad water as to be quite unfit for human use. I am really frightened at the thought of what will take place before the army gets to Dadur. However, I hear that they will not advance for another month, and that some very energetic steps will be made to secure a water-supply before they come along."

On the following day Angus passed several working parties who were engaged under the superintendence of Major Leech, assistant to Sir Alexander Burnes—for Captain Burnes had been knighted as a reward for his services in Cabul. With the exception of these parties they scarcely encountered a human being on the way down, except in the miserable little villages which were situated where the soil permitted the cultivation of a scanty crop, which was for the most part cut when green and sold to passing travellers. Angus was heartily glad when Shikarpore came in sight. He

had learned from Captain Thompson that Shah Soojah had arrived there with a native army which he had raised, that the Bengal army under General Cotton, which had marched down by the Indus, was expected to arrive there in a day or two, and that the Bombay army under Sir John Keane was but a few days behind.

Upon entering the town he was glad to see British uniforms in the street, and addressing in English the first officer he met, he found that the division of General Cotton had arrived two days before.

"I have just come from Herat," Angus said. "I left there after the siege was raised. I have some despatches from Lieutenant Pottinger, which should be given either to Colonel Pottinger or to Sir Alexander Burnes."

"Burnes is here. I think that Colonel Pottinger is at Sukkar, he was there a few days ago; you will find Burnes at the head-quarters. He is the political officer and so forth of the army; but Macnaghten is envoy and commissioner to Soojah, and generally at the head of all political business."

The army was encamped round the town, and Angus had no difficulty in finding the quarters of Sir Alexander Burnes. Dismounting a short distance away, he left Azim to look after the horses and went towards the tent. He was stopped by a sentry, who on learning that he wished to see Sir Alexander, called an attendant. The latter, coming up, took Angus's name in, and reappearing at the entrance almost immediately, signed to him to enter.

CHAPTER VII

IN THE SERVICE

"I AM glad to see you, Mr. Campbell," Sir Alexander Burnes said as the lad entered his tent. "Colonel Pottinger was asking me only three or four days ago to keep a look-out for you. He had received a letter from his nephew saying that you were going to travel down *via* Candahar, and that he was afraid that you would not manage to get through. I myself received a letter from Lieutenant Pottinger speaking very highly of services that you had rendered, and I understand that both he and Mr. M'Neill, our minister in Persia, spoke very favourably of you in their despatches to the Governor-general. How have you got through?"

"I had very little difficulty, sir, except that I was detained at Candahar, and had to effect my escape secretly." And he gave a short account of his journey, and the manner in which he had escaped from Candahar and avoided recapture.

"You managed it very cleverly, Mr. Campbell. I will take you in at once to Macnaghten, who is supreme here, for Shah Soojah is at present little more than a puppet. I have no doubt that he will be very glad to learn what is the feeling throughout the country as to Shah Soojah. I may tell you in confidence that I am convinced that a terrible blunder has been made in taking up his cause. I was, as you no doubt know, several months at Cabul, and I am convinced that Dost Mahomed was sincere in his desire for our friendship, and that he can support himself against his brothers at Candahar, who have, as we know, been intriguing with Persia and Russia. I have all along urged the Indian Government to give him warm support and to enter

into a firm alliance with him. However, the Governor-general and his advisers have taken the other view, and I have only to do my best to carry out their orders, although I have strongly represented my own opinion.

"I do not think that Government has any idea of the difficulties to be encountered. So far as fighting goes there is no doubt whatever that the Afghans cannot stand against us, but the operation of feeding the troops and animals will be a troublesome one indeed. The heat will increase every day, and even the march up to Quettah will present enormous difficulties, as you who have just descended the pass will readily understand; but the great problem will not be how to place Shah Soojah on the throne but how to maintain him there. I tell you this because Macnaghten, who really knows nothing of the matter, is extremely sanguine. I warn you that it will be as well that you should not express any strong opinion against the enterprise. It is determined upon, and will be carried out, and without in any way shaking his opinion you would only set him against you and might seriously injure your own prospects. As it is, he has much to irritate him. There have already been serious troubles with the Ameers of Scinde, who have been treated in a very high-handed manner instead of being conciliated in every possible way. This alone has vastly added to the difficulty, by rendering it almost impossible to obtain carriage or provisions.

"Then he differs greatly from General Cotton, who, since his arrival here two days ago, has shown himself an officer who has an immense opinion of his own dignity. As general in command he declines to take any orders, or indeed to listen to any advice, from Macnaghten. This is certainly not Macnaghten's fault, who, although, as I consider, mistaken in his opinions, is very conciliating in his manner, and would willingly avoid all friction, which can but be disadvantageous

to the enterprise on which he has set his heart. Cotton's transport is really insufficient for his own army; Shah Soojah has hardly any transport at all. Cotton cares not in the slightest about the Shah or the Shah's army, and, to say the truth, they are of no great value.

"Macnaghten, however, attaches, and reasonably from his point of view, great importance to the fact that Shah Soojah should appear as arriving to claim his throne as an independent prince with his own army, supported by his allies the British, and not as a mere puppet forced upon the Afghans by British bayonets; and he is therefore most anxious that he and his force should occupy as prominent a position as possible. It is as well for me to give you these hints as to the situation before you see Macnaghten, and to warn you against speaking to him strongly of any hostile opinions as to Shah Soojah's chances that you may have gathered on your journey. When a man has an open mind it is well to give him both sides of the case, but when he has pledged his reputation and thrown himself heart and soul into one side of the case it is worse than useless to endeavour to turn him, especially when the die is cast and the day for drawing back is past. If my opinion, gathered from nine months' residence in Cabul and almost daily interviews with Dost Mahomed, has been altogether unheeded, certainly yours, gathered in a passing trip through the country, would have no effect whatever beyond setting him against you."

"Thank you, sir, I will be careful; and indeed my opinion would in any case be of little value. I certainly conversed a good deal with the natives on my way from Herat to Candahar, but at that city I spoke only to Persian merchants, and had no intercourse whatever on my way down, except with my guides in the Bolan passes."

"Well we will call on him now," Sir Alexander Burnes said, taking his cap.

Mr. Macnaghten's tent was next to his own, and he at once took Angus in with him.

"I have come, Mr. Macnaghten, to introduce to you Mr. Angus Campbell, who has just come down through Candahar from Herat. His name was, I know, very favourably mentioned both by Lieutenant Pottinger and Mr. M'Neill. He has brought down letters of introduction to me and Colonel Pottinger."

"I know your name well, sir," Macnaghten said. "Mr. M'Neill told us that you had been in his service, and had gone to Herat on a mission to induce Shah Kamran to hold out to the last, and that when the siege was raised you had started from there with the intention of journeying down through Afghanistan into Scinde, in hopes of obtaining employment in some capacity where your knowledge of Persian and Arabic would be of service. I also understand, by Lieutenant Pottinger's last despatch, that you have learned Pushtoo. The Governor-general was very favourably impressed with these reports, and authorized me to employ you at once as one of the junior assistants. I should think, Sir Alexander, that you can employ Mr. Campbell to greater advantage than I can, as the work of making the arrangements for the advance of the army is in your hands."

"I shall be very glad of an addition to my staff, for as we get on I foresee that the three officers who now assist me will be altogether insufficient; and the high terms in which Mr. M'Neill and Lieutenant Pottinger have written about him, and the fact that he has been able to travel about the country unsuspected, shows his fitness for such work."

"You must understand, Mr. Campbell," Macnaghten said, "I cannot guarantee that the position will be a permanent one, as all such appointments in the service must be confirmed by the Court of Directors; but I shall at once acquaint Lord Auckland of your arrival here and of your

nomination, and I have no doubt that he will himself confirm it so far as this expedition continues, and will strongly recommend the Court of Directors that your appointment to the service shall be a permanent one, in view of your exceptional knowledge of Persian and Pushtoo."

"I thank you very much indeed, sir, and will do my best to merit your good opinion."

As Angus left the tent with Sir Alexander Burnes he said: "I am indeed obliged to you, sir. I had hoped that I might obtain an appointment of some sort, but I never hoped for one like this. It is the work, too, of all others that I should like, and you may rely on me to carry out your orders to the full extent of my power."

"I have no doubt you will, Mr. Campbell. I am glad to have one of my officers speak Pushtoo, for although both in Scinde and Afghanistan Persian is the language most spoken by the upper classes, it is of no use with the peasants. In the work of digging wells, bargaining for fodder for the horses, and so forth, Pushtoo will be very useful, for although it differs from the language of the Belooches, it is near enough for them to understand it; and, of course, when we are once through the Bolan it is the language of all the countrymen."

"May I ask what dress it will be proper for me to wear?"

"As it is a civil appointment you will not wear uniform, but either the ordinary civilian dress, or, if you like, a dress of oriental character. I generally dress so, and it certainly has its advantages, and favourably predisposes chiefs you may have to visit. A British uniform they understand, but a purely civilian dress is too simple for them, and does not convey any sense of importance."

"Very well, sir; I am glad that you have decided so. I have no civilian clothes with me, and should find it very difficult, if not impossible, to get them here."

"Your appointment will be a thousand rupees a month, so long as the campaign lasts; after that it would, of course, depend upon the future employment you might have. If you would like to draw a month's pay in advance you can do so."

"No, thank you, sir; I am fairly provided with money."

"I have four officers employed on similar duty, Mr. Campbell, I will introduce you to them at once; and you will, of course, mess with our party."

Major Leech, the chief assistant, was away on duty, but the other three officers were at once sent for. "Captain Jones, Captain Arbuthnot, and Lieutenant Macgregor, I wish to introduce to you Mr. Campbell, whom I have just appointed as one of my political assistants. He has distinguished himself greatly under Lieutenant Pottinger throughout the siege of Herat, and was previously an assistant to Mr. M'Neill, our ambassador at the court of Persia. He speaks Persian, Arabic, and Pushtoo, and has been specially recommended to the Governor-general by Mr. M'Neill and Pottinger. He has now made his way from Herat through Candahar, and the fact that he has done so safely shows that he knows how to use these languages to advantage."

As Lieutenant Pottinger's gallant defence of Herat was the theme of general admiration throughout India, Angus could not have had a better introduction, and he was warmly received by the three officers, who at once took him away with them.

"You will share my tent with me," Lieutenant Macgregor said. "I am alone at present. You have a horse, of course, and a servant, I suppose?"

"I have a very fair horse, and an excellent servant, who is a young fellow, a Persian, the son of a doorkeeper at the embassy. He was with me through the siege, and I found him invaluable. He is a strong fellow, and has plenty of

courage and shrewdness; I should never have got away out of Candahar had it not been for his assistance.

"Sir Alexander has advised me to get an Eastern dress, as I cannot wear uniform; and I must see about that at once, for this Persian dress would in any case have been out of place, and my journey down the Bolan has ruined it altogether. But in the first place, I shall be obliged if you will tell me where my two horses are to be put up."

"Your horse will be picketed with ours in our tents; our servants' horses are in the line behind them. Is that your man over there with the two horses? I will send an orderly to tell him to take them over and picket them. Now, I suppose you want something to eat? We had tiffin an hour ago, but the servants can get something for you."

"Thank you; I will go down into the town. I had something before mounting this morning, and I own I should not care about going into the mess-tent till I have got something to wear a little more respectable than these clothes."

"Oh, that is nonsense. Besides, you need not go into the mess-tent. I will order them to warm something up at once, and to bring it into my tent. We are all wanting to hear more about Herat. The official despatches only give us bare facts."

For the next two hours Angus was fully occupied in relating his experiences of the siege to the three officers; after that he went down with Azim to the town. There he bought for himself a dress such as would be worn by a native of some rank—a white turban, a blue tunic opening at the breast and showing a white cambric shirt, several white robes, and loose white linen trousers tightened in at the ankle. He bought a good supply of under-linen and a couple of pairs of native riding-boots. For Azim be bought clothes appropriate to a retainer of a Mohammedan gentleman. As he was unable to procure a camp bed of European make, he

bought a native charpoy, which could be taken to pieces and conveniently carried. He had found that his fellow-officers had each three native servants—a butler or body servant, a syce for their riding horses, and a man who looked after and led on the line of march two baggage animals. He had no difficulty in engaging a syce, and let the question of the baggage animals stand over until next day.

Azim would, of course, act as his personal servant. The lad, who had during the past year become imbued with the spirit of adventure, was delighted to hear that his master was to accompany the army. He had, during his stay in Herat, picked up the language, and could converse in it as fluently as Angus himself was able to do; and although he had no pleasant recollections of the journey from Candahar, he felt sure that it would be a very different affair when accompanying a British army. He expressed as much to his master, who said:

"I should not make so sure of that, Azim. We had no great difficulty in obtaining provisions for ourselves, but it will be a very different thing with an army of thousands of men, with an even larger number of camp followers and five or six thousand camels. Except just round one of those little villages, we did not see a blade of grass from the time we left the Shawl valley, and how the animals will exist till we get up to Quettah I have no idea. Once there no doubt we shall do fairly well, but we shall have a very bad time on the journey, unless I am mistaken. If I had the management of affairs, I should send off at once the whole of the camels with a sufficient escort as far as Dadur. There they should leave the provisions and forage they took up, and return here to accompany the army with a further supply. No doubt it would cause a month's delay, but it would be better to do that than to lose half our baggage animals and to risk famine for the troops."

"I believe," Captain Arbuthnot said when Angus joined the others, "that ten days' supply are ready at Dadur, and twenty days' supply at Quettah."

"Certainly there were no supplies at Dadur when I came through, but I know nothing about Quettah," Angus said; "still I think that if any supplies of consequence had been collected there I should have heard about it from the men who guided us through the pass."

"There were no troops there, then?"

"No, not the slightest sign of them, nor did we pass any on the march down from Candahar; but of course the Khan of Khelat may have collected a great force of Belooches, and if he did so, he would naturally keep them at Khelat until he heard that the army was approaching, as it would be an immense deal of trouble to victual them in the pass."

"I know that Mr. Macnaghten received news which induced him to believe that a large force would be likely to march down from Candahar, and that the attitude of the princes was altogether hostile. It is on account of that news that we are going to advance in two or three days' time, instead of waiting for another three weeks for a larger stock of supplies to be collected. It was but ten days ago that the commissary-general sent off four thousand camels to bring up supplies from the rear. However, they will be useful for the Bombay column which is coming up, as it is arranged that we shall collect transport and supplies for them.

"Therefore the decision has been taken to march at once, so that we can ascend the pass before the enemy send a sufficient force to hold it against us. No doubt the report that we were not going to leave here for another three weeks has been sent up to Candahar. The Prince is sure to have agents and spies here. We ought to be at the foot of the Bolan before it is known in Candahar that we have started.

As to Khelat, the Khan has sent in assurances of his friendship, and I expect he will make himself safe by assuming neutrality; but the Belooches are a warlike people, and born plunderers, and his authority is very slight, except in Khelat and the district near it. We are sure to have trouble with the mountaineers, but beyond having to protect the convoy strongly, I do not suppose we shall have serious fighting with them. I expect that we shall be sent off to-morrow or next day to Khelat and Quettah, perhaps one of us may even go to Candahar. I know that Mr. Macnaghten thinks that possibly the princes may not take an active part on Dost Mahomed's side. Everyone knows that they have no great love for their brother; which is not surprising, for he, who is the youngest of the family, has managed to secure the sovereignty. Besides, they would see that if they took up arms in his favour the whole brunt of the fighting would fall upon them, for Cabul could render them no real assistance. They are very shifty gentlemen, and though they may make a show of force at first, it would probably be only for the purpose of securing advantageous terms for themselves."

"I saw them when I was at Candahar," Angus said, "and they, or at least one of them, questioned me closely; but supposing me to be a Persian just arrived from Herat, he naturally said nothing about a British invasion. His great anxiety was to know what the intentions and power of Russia and Persia were. No doubt the plans that were formed were entirely disconcerted by the Shah's retreat from before Herat. I saw no signs whatever of any gatherings of the Afghans, nor was the subject ever alluded to in the conversations I had with traders at the place where I lodged."

At this moment a native officer came in and said that

Sir Alexander desired to see Captains Arbuthnot and Jones. As they buckled on their swords the latter said: "You have told us about Herat, Mr. Campbell, and this evening I hope you will tell us about your journey down."

When the officers returned Angus found that Arbuthnot was not mistaken as to the probable work they would have to perform, for he was to accompany Major Todd the next morning with an escort of cavalry for Khelat. They were to see the Khan and arrange with him for supplies to be sent to Dadur. Captain Jones was to remain there to see that his promises were carried out, and Arbuthnot, unless he learned that a force from Candahar had arrived at Quettah, was to go on there and see to the collection of grain and cattle.

"A squadron of cavalry is going forward to-morrow morning, Campbell. Four hundred labourers are going with it, and you are to be in special charge of half of them. Of course, they will have eight or ten headmen, but they will want looking after all the same. They are to dig wells at Burshoree; the other half, under you, Macgregor, are to do the same thing at Meerpoor. It is a thousand pities it was not done before, for the army is to begin its advance the day after to-morrow. However, you will gain a couple of days on them, and that is something. If you meet Major Leech, who is at work improving the roads, you will, of course, report yourself to him, and he will doubtless be able to advise you as to the best place for the wells."

Angus heard the news with much satisfaction. In the first place it meant active work, and in the second it would save him from the slow and toilsome march of the army, which would, he felt sure, be accompanied with enormous hardship. The four officers dined together. Sir A. Burnes was not present, as he was dining with General Cotton and Mr. Macnaghten. After dinner Angus related his adven-

ture at Candahar; how he evaded pursuit, and his passage through the pass. He had hardly finished when he was sent for to the general's tent.

"I have just been telling General Cotton, Mr. Campbell," said Mr. Macnaghten, "that you arrived this morning from Candahar. He wishes to learn as much as you can tell him of the state of the pass at present, and of the country between Dadur and this place. I told him that I had not been able to find time to question you on these points."

"In the first place," the general said, "what is the state of the Bolan?"

"As I only travelled during the night I cannot tell you very much about it. The river is not high, and there is no difficulty whatever on that score. The ground is generally extremely rough, and covered not only with rounded boulders, but by rocks that will prove very trying to the feet of the animals. We bandaged very thickly the hoofs of our horses to deaden the sound, and so saved them from being lamed, which they othewise would certainly have been. The bandages were of felt, and these were completely cut to pieces the first night. After that we cut up one of the water-skins I had with me, and we covered the felt with the leather, but even this was cut to pieces, and had to be renewed the next night. Although this is the general character of the pass, there are places at which, by skirting the foot of the hills at points where the pass opens out—and the hills are not precipitous, although everywhere steep—it is possible for mounted men to go along at a fast walk, the stones being much smaller, and like, I should think, what I have heard of a sea-beach, though I never saw one, at least that I can remember."

"Still, there were no insurmountable difficulties, Mr. Campbell?"

"No, sir, though there were places where certainly not more than two laden camels could pass abreast."

"Well, next as to the country between this place and Dadur. We know about it as far as the edge of Beloochee Desert; what is it beyond that? Did you suffer from want of water?"

"No, sir, at the villages where we stoppped there was always water; but there were, as far as I saw, but a few small wells, which would seem to me very insufficient for the supply of an army and its train."

"Well, we are going to dig more wells," Mr. Macnaghten said rather impatiently. "If the water will run into three or four wells it would run into fifty. Now, about forage?"

"There were small patches of cultivation round each of the villages; at Bhag more than elsewhere, as it lies nearer to the foot of the hills; but at Meerpoor, Burshoree, and Rojhan I should not say there were more than twenty or thirty acres of cultivated land. At Bhag I was strongly advised to take the road at the foot of the hills to Dundeaver down to Larkhanna, and from there to follow the Indus up to Sukkar; but the guides said that I should be more likely to be troubled by the Beloochees along that route, and as it was also twice as far I took the straight way here."

"Thank you. We will not detain you any longer, Mr. Campbell, and we are obliged for the information that you have given us."

Angus bowed and retired. He felt that Mr. Macnaghten was vexed that he could not report better upon the chances of obtaining sufficient supplies of forage and water. But he felt that it was clearly better that he should give, in the plainest terms, the true state of affairs, for when, as he was sure would be the case, there was immense suffering of men

and animals. the blame would fall upon him if he had given a more hopeful account than the facts warranted.

Sir A. Burnes sent for him on leaving the general's tent.

"You did quite right in not giving a rose-coloured description of the state of things along the line of march, Mr. Campbell. Of course neither Mr. Macnaghten nor General Cotton liked it. Neither of them, in fact, has the slightest idea of the troubles ahead of them, and both were inclined to view me as a pessimist. However, it will not matter to you very greatly whether Macnaghten is pleased with you or not, because your reports will be sent in to me. This sort of work will not last very long. I have only undertaken it because Major Garden, General Cotton's quartermaster-general, has been taken ill. Major Craikie, the adjutant-general, will go forward with me the day after tomorrow to superintend matters generally. I hope by that time to have a thousand more men for well-digging. Major Leech has gone to Sebee to cut a dam there on the river Naree, which it is hoped will fill the small water-courses and greatly assist us. I have more fear about forage than water. You can dig wells and cut dams, but you can't get a crop to grow at a day's notice. However, we must hope for the best."

The next morning at three o'clock Angus and Lieutenant Macgregor started with the laborours and an escort of fifty native cavalry.

"I am very glad to be off, Campbell," Macgregor said. "It has been disheartening work for some time. Somehow or other nothing has gone smoothly since we started. Of course I am only a sub, but certainly it seems to me that so far there has been an enormous amount of unnecessary friction, and that the chiefs have not gone the right way to work. I don't believe myself in this Shah

whom we are going to force upon the Afghans. Dost Mahomed is worth a dozen of him, and no one who knows anything of the affairs of Afghanistan is able to understand why Lord Auckland and Macnaghten and the rest of them should ever have conceived the idea of supplanting a man who has shown himself really desirous of our alliance and friendship, and who undoubtedly possesses the support of a majority of his countrymen, by one who has never shown any talent, who has no party whatever in Afghanistan, and is a member of a discredited and fallen family.

"Still, that is their affair; but matters have been complicated by the manner in which the Emirs of Scinde have been treated. Instead of regarding them, as they have always shown themselves, as friendly to us, we have gone out of our way to render them hostile, by the manner in which we have, in absolute contradiction of the terms of their treaty with us, compelled them to furnish carriage, provisions, and money. Had they been a conquered country we could not have carried matters with a higher hand. It will be sure to lead to trouble some day, and certainly adds immensely to our difficulties. Now, the very fact that, in the days when he was for a short time ruler in Afghanistan, Soojah advanced all sorts of preposterous claims of suzerainty over a large portion of Scinde, was in itself a reason why, if we took the absurd step of placing him on the throne of Cabul, we should have advanced from Peshawur through Jellalabad direct, instead of taking this roundabout journey through Scinde. Of course there would have been great difficulties in the Khyber, and we should have had to encounter fierce opposition from the hill-tribesmen, but that will have to be met in any case. And after installing Soojah at Cabul, we could have gradually extended his power—or ours, for of course he would be but a puppet in

our hands—through Ghuznee to Candahar. Of course you won't hear any talk like this among the officers of the Bombay or Bengal army. They know and care nothing about the matter. It is just among the men who have been employed here in the north, and who know something about it, that there is any doubt as to the wisdom of the affair. I know Burnes considers that the whole thing is a mistake. Colonel Pottinger, who, as our resident in Scinde, knows a great deal about the Afghans, says little, but I know that he disapproves of it; and so, I think, do all of us juniors, who have worked either under him, or with Burnes, or up in the Punjaub, and have, of course, always taken an interest in the affairs of Afghanistan, especially since Russian influence has become so preponderant in Persia. Well, we can only hope for the best, and do our best in our own little way. Thank goodness, whatever comes of it, we have no responsibility in the affair."

"I really know very little about it," Angus said; "but I do know that it will be a terrible business getting the army to Quettah, and that directly it was determined to come this way arrangements should have been made to dig sufficient wells to ensure a supply of water at every watering-place, and to collect stores of forage and grain. I really don't see how it is to be done now. From all that I could hear as I came down, there will be a lot of trouble with the Beloochees."

The difficulties of the advance had already been felt. Great numbers of camels had died between Sukkar and Shikarpore, and those that accompanied the party of well-diggers were enfeebled, and looked as if they had accomplished a long forced march instead of the strong and fresh animals one would expect to see setting out on such an enterprise. The first halting-place was Jagan. The next day they started at the same early hour and proceeded to

Janeedera. Here they had passed beyond the boundary of the Scinde Ameers, and had entered the territory over which the Khan of Khelat held nominal authority. At this place there was a small mud fort, outside of which straw had been collected for the use of the cavalry, and to guard this a small party of Shah Soojah's troops had been posted. These, however, had been attacked and driven off by a Beloochee band, and the straw carried away. However, there was sufficient water in the wells for the men and animals.

The next day's march was a long one, but at Rojhan a certain amount of forage had been collected, and there was a fair supply of water. The country so far had been barren, with occasional bushes, but beyond Rojhan they had nothing but an absolutely flat surface of sand, without a blade of grass or a bush to break the level expanse; across this desert the party toiled on for twenty-seven miles. A little water was carried by the camels, but this supply was soon exhausted, and with parched lips and throats the men plodded on, knowing that until the end of the journey no water could be obtained. Scarce a word was spoken during the painful journey. Passing over the ground as he came down at a canter, Angus had thought but little of it; he had done it in less than four hours, and there was no trouble from the dust. It was very different now. It was fourteen hours from the time of starting before they reached Burshoree, the mounted men having to accommodate their pace to that of the labourers, and the dust rose in dense clouds.

A part of the cavalry rode ahead, the rest some half a mile behind the main body of the footmen. But before half the journey was done these began to straggle, and the dust had no time to settle before the horsemen came along. Fully half the labourers, indeed, threw themselves down on

the sand incapable of going farther, and lay there until the cool evening air revived them, and it was long after midnight before many of them reached Burshoree. Here a considerable number of wells had already been dug by the party under Major Leech. The water was muddy, and trickled in but slowly. Still it was water, and men and horses drank it eagerly as fast as it could be brought up in buckets and emptied into troughs which had been erected.

Although the village—a mere collection of native huts, surrounded by a wall as a protection against the plundering Beloochees—offered a most uninviting prospect, Angus was well pleased that he had arrived at the end of his journey, and had not, like Macgregor, another day's march to perform. The latter started as usual at three o'clock, and an hour later Angus, with some difficulty, roused his two hundred weary men and set them to work, promising them that if they laboured hard he would allow them to rest during the heat of the day. Cheered by the promise, the labourers set to work under their headmen. Each of these had charge of twenty workmen; these were divided into two gangs and worked wells close together. Angus had nothing to do save to exercise a sort of general superintendence. The soil became much more firm a few feet below the surface, and as the sides stood satisfactorily it was not necessary to make the wells of any great depth. It was found that four men only could be employed on each, two working in the bottom and the others bringing up the earth with buckets and ropes, consequently, the number of the wells was largely increased. After three days of prodigious toil, water was reached in the majority of the wells, and by the end of the fourth day fifty had been added to those already dug. The liquid, however, oozed in but slowly, and when a well was emptied it was two or three hours before water could again be drawn from it; thus although the amount

that could be obtained altogether was considerable, it was still wholly insufficient for the supply of an army. Five-and-twenty of the native cavalry were kept constantly on the alert, for parties of plundering Beloochees hovered round, and several of the well-diggers who, in spite of orders, ventured to wander some distance away were robbed and killed.

The next morning General Thackwell, with a body of cavalry, a small force of infantry, and some irregular horse, rode into the place. He brought with him an order from Sir A. Burnes for Angus to accompany him. The well-diggers were to remain there and continue their work. The general had intended to stop there for two or three days, but finding that no forage could be procured, he started the next morning early and rode through Meerpoor to Oostar, a distance of twenty-seven miles, where, as had been reported by Major Leech, there was a small reservoir of water, and a store of straw and grass had been collected. Angus stopped for an hour at Meerpoor and had a talk with Macgregor, whose men had also accomplished a great deal of work, and who bewailed his fate at having to remain there instead of going forward with General Thackwell.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ADVANCE

THE cutting of the dam of the Naree did not afford so much aid as had been hoped for, for the thirsty soil absorbed the water almost as fast as it poured out, and it was not until many days later that it began to fill the little irrigation canals at the villages through which the

army passed. After resting two days at Oostar, the force proceeded to Bhag, a town of some size. Here water was found in abundance, and grain in considerable quantities, and also a supply of carrots, which were eagerly purchased by the officers for the use of their horses. At the various places where they halted Angus acted as interpreter, and rode out with a small body of cavalry to villages at which they learned a certain amount of forage could be obtained.

At Bhag, to his great satisfaction, Sir Alexander Burnes joined the party. He had paid a visit to the Khan of Khelat, and obtained from him stringent orders to the headmen of villages and others to do all in their power to aid the army. The inhabitants were all to be set to work to dig the holes, for which they would receive payments from the British. The Khan also promised to despatch to Dadur what supplies he could gather, but explained that unfortunately there was a much greater difficulty than usual in collecting provisions, as the previous season had been a very bad one, and in many parts of the country the villagers had not been able to gather sufficient for their own needs. As Angus had heard the same at Candahar, at the village near Quettah, and from his guide, there could be no doubt that this excuse was a genuine one, and indeed the officers who had been engaged in Scinde and in the country bordering the Indus affirmed that the supplies obtainable there were also vastly smaller than had been anticipated.

Throughout the next week Angus was continually employed in riding among the towns in the khanate, interviewing headmen, and expediting the despatch of convoys. He was always accompanied by a troop of cavalry, for plundering parties of Beloochees were making their way on all sides towards the line followed by the army, where they murdered stragglers, captured lagging camels, and were so bold that they ventured close to the outskirts of

the villages occupied by the British camps, robbed the natives of the moneys paid them for forage or grain, and rendered it necessary that every convoy should be protected by a considerable escort. After a week of this work, Angus received orders to join the force that was gathering at Dadur. During the last two days' march the difficulties with regard to water had disappeared. The villages had all been situated on the Bolan river, and little irrigation canals enabled the cultivation of a considerable tract of country to be carried on, which supplied forage in sufficient quantity for the first division of the army which came along.

Dadur, a town of some four thousand inhabitants, stands on the eastern branch of the Bolan river, whose banks were fringed with high reeds and groves of dwarf trees. The country round was well cultivated, and the fields were covered with young crops of wheat and barley. Close to the town were gardens, and the whole presented an agreeable appearance to the troops, who had for nearly three weeks been painfully making their way across country which, even at its best points, was little more than a sandy desert. Here Angus again met Sir Alexander Burnes, who had been making the greatest efforts to accumulate supplies at the town. His success, however, had been very small, nor had Major Leech, who was also at Dadur, been more fortunate. It had been reckoned that twenty days' supplies for the whole army would have been accumulated there, but not more than sufficient for two or three days had been gathered, and General Cotton, on arriving there with the Bengal army, decided that it was necessary for at least a portion of the army to advance without delay.

Sir Alexander Burnes started at once with Major Cureton of the 16th Lancers, with a troop of that regiment, three companies of the Native Infantry, and a strong party of

sappers and miners, to survey the pass up to Quettah. Major Leech was sent to Khelet to maintain a strong pressure upon the Khan, and it was still hoped that stores might be collected by the time the Bombay army came along. The report sent down was satisfactory inasmuch as the physical difficulties of the journey were concerned. In spite of the fact that heavy rains had fallen, the river had not risen sufficiently to interfere seriously with the passage of troops and animals, and on the 16th of March the Horse Artillery, 2nd Light Cavalry, the 13th Regiment of the line, and the 48th Native Infantry, started early in the morning, forded by torchlight the Bolan river, and at eight o'clock pitched their camp in the valley, where they were to rest for the day.

The road had so far offered no difficulties, except that the river had to be forded no fewer than eight times. The baggage animals which started at midnight had already arrived, but the tents were pitched with some difficulty owing to the rocky nature of the ground, which necessitated the use of iron tent-pegs instead of the wooden ones previously used. Fortunately, owing to the pause that had been made by the advance parties at Dadur, and the abundance of succulent food they had obtained there, the animals had recovered to a large extent from their previous fatigues and hardships, and the journey through the pass was accomplished with less loss and suffering than had occurred during the march from Sukkar. Vast numbers of animals, however, died, and the troops, who had started full of life and strength, were sadly changed, many of them being utterly worn out and a mere shadow of their former selves. The rumour that had precipitated the march by three weeks, upset all the transport arrangements, and caused so vast an amount of suffering, proved to be false—no for-

ward movement had been made by the Candahar princes, and except for some little trouble with the marauding villagers, the march was entirely unopposed.

Once in the Shawl valley the fatigues of the army were over for the time, but in spite of the efforts of Sir A. Burnes and his assistants, only a very small amount of food and forage had been collected in readiness for them. So small indeed was the supply that it was necessary to place both the troops and native followers on reduced rations of flour, rice, and ghee. Meat, however, was plentiful. The proceedings of the Khan of Khelat were not of a character to inspire confidence in him. While protesting strongly his friendship for us, he told our officers frankly that he was certain Shah Soojah would not retain his position for a day after the British troops marched away; that the whole feeling of the country was against him, and that although, had he advanced with only a native army raised by himself, he might have been accepted, the people would never submit to a sovereign thrust upon them by British bayonets.

Opinions differed much as to his sincerity. Those who doubted it pointed to the fact, that although he was said to have large stores of provisions at Khelat, he had scarcely sold any to our troops, and had failed in all his promises in that direction. On the other hand, Sir A. Burnes maintained that the stores of provisions spoken of did not exist; and that in any case, having no belief in the possibility of Shah Soojah maintaining himself, it was but natural that he should hang back until he saw how matters went, for if he were to give any active aid to the British he would be considered a traitor by his countrymen, and would imperil his khanate and his life when our protection was withdrawn from him. The question was never satisfactorily cleared up. Some of those who took part in the proceedings and wrote on the subject regarded him as a very ill-used man,

while others considered the measures afterwards taken against him as being fully justified by his conduct.

As it was absolutely necessary that food should be obtained, parties were sent into the villages and a rigorous search instituted, and in this way a considerable quantity of hidden grain was discovered. This was taken and paid for at the market price. In Quettah itself one very large store was found and taken up for the use of the army.

The climate was pleasant, and in spite of reduced rations the men benefited by the halt, which was not without its excitement, for large bands of plunderers hovered round, attacks were frequently made upon parties going out with camels to graze, and expeditions to punish the villages to which the marauders belonged were undertaken. At length General Sir John Keane, who was in command of the whole expedition, arrived at Quettah, to the satisfaction of the army, for it was thought that some decision must now be arrived at. It was evident to all that, unless something were done, famine would ere long stare them in the face. The European troops could indeed exist upon meat, but the native troops and camp followers, the greater portion of whom were not meat-eaters, were already in sore distress, the supply of grain and rice barely sufficing to keep life together. The hope was justified. As soon as the general arrived the heads of the departments were assembled and arrangements were made for an advance. The greater portion of the Bombay army arrived soon after their commander, and although the men were still weakened by privation the army was in most respects perfectly capable of carrying out the work successfully. There was, however, one serious drawback which threatened to destroy their efficiency: the horses of the cavalry and artillery and the animals of the transport were so weakened by want of grain and hay that they were altogether unfit for hard work.

It was upon the 7th of April that the army moved forward, seven weeks having elapsed since they started from Shikarpore. The march to Candahar was long and painful, several passes had to be traversed, food became more and more scarce, and hundreds of animals died daily. Beloochee plunderers during the first portion of the journey, and Afghan raiders during the second, hung along the line of march, murdering all who straggled, capturing camels, at times even threatening an attack in force. They were able to do this, as our cavalry horses were so broken down that they could scarcely proceed beyond a walk. The Candahar princes with a large following came out to give battle; but Hajee Khan Kakur, one of the leading chiefs, had been bribed by our political officers, and deserting, came into our camp with a large body of followers, and this so disheartened the princes, and excited so much fear among them of further treachery, that they withdrew at once to Candahar, and a few hours after their arrival there took the northern road. After immense suffering from want of water and food, the army entered the city on the 26th of April, Shah Soojah having gone on with Hajee Kakur and made a formal entry into the town two days previously.

Angus had had little to do during the march from Quettah. The chances of obtaining forage or food at the deserted villages near the line of march were so small that Sir John Keane decided that it would be useless to endeavour to obtain anything there, especially as an officer leaving the main body had to be accompanied by a strong escort to protect him from the bands of marauders, and it was deemed inadvisable to give the horses any work that could be avoided. Angus's own animal, being accustomed to the country, suffered less than those from the plains, and in order to spare it as much as possible, and keep it in such a condition that it would be fit for work were he ordered

to make any expedition, he generally walked by its side the greater part of the day, preferring this, indeed, to sitting on horseback and moving at the snail's pace necessitated by the difficulties of the road and the slow progress of the weakened animals of the baggage train. Among these the mortality had been terrible, and one writer estimated that no fewer than thirty thousand transport animals died on the road between Sukkar and Candahar.

Shah Soojah had at first established himself in his camp outside the city, but two days after the arrival of the army he took up his abode at the palace. He was accompanied by his own officials and by Macnaghten and Burnes and their assistants.

"What are you smiling at, Campbell?" Lieutenant Macgregor, who had been his companion and tent-fellow since they left Dadur, asked as they rode together into the city.

"I am thinking of the difference between my position in this procession, and the fact that I am going to take up my quarters in the palace, and the position I occupied when I was last here—a pretended trader, suspected and watched, and obliged to escape by night."

"Yes, it is a change, certainly," Macgregor said, "and one for the better, though, after what we have gone through and all we may have to go through before we leave this wretched country, I don't think it would be safe to assert that it is less dangerous now than it was then. From the time we left Shikarpore till we arrived here three days ago, we have never had a decent meal, we have practically never had enough to eat, we have suffered horribly from thirst, we have never dared to ride a hundred yards beyond the column or camp; we have lived, in fact, dogs' lives—not the life of a respectable dog in England, but of a starving cur in an Indian bazaar. We don't know much about the future; I don't suppose we shall suffer from hunger and thirst as we

have done, but our dangers of other kinds will certainly not be abated. Everything looks smooth enough here. I don't think there is any enthusiasm at all for Soojah, but there is no doubt that the princes were hated, and the people heartily glad to be rid of them. I fancy that we shall not have much difficulty in reaching Cabul. They say Ghuznee is a strong place, but we have taken scores of places in India that the natives considered impregnable. Still, considering the way in which these marauding Afghans hover round us, I think we shall have a very uncomfortable time of it."

As the soldiers were not at first allowed to enter the city, the merchants there speedily established a temporary bazaar outside the walls. Here vendors of rose-water, of sherbet, and of a drink concocted of the juice of fruits, took up their stalls. People from the country round brought in loads of lucerne, wheat, barley, wood, and chopped straw. Other merchants displayed posteens, pelisses made of sheepskins, with the wool inside and embroidered outside with blue, red, and yellow thread; fowls, sheep, onions, milk, tobacco, and spices were also on sale, and before long the horse-dealers of Herat brought down large numbers of good animals, which were eagerly bought up by officers who had lost their chargers. As soon as the soldiers were allowed to enter the town they poured into it. Wheaten cakes, cooked meat, and mulberries tempted their appetite, and a little later plums and apricots were brought in in great profusion.

The scenes in the streets were very amusing. The British soldiers and Sepoys with their large variety of uniforms mingled with the people of the town and country round. Some of these wore long cloaks of chintz or woollen cloth, with large turbans; their hair, beards, and moustaches being allowed to grow very long, and the beards being dyed red.

Others were closely shaven, and dressed in jackets and trousers of blue linen, and tunics of brown cloth with long hanging sleeves, their heads being protected by skull-caps of various colours.

With May the heat, which already had been great, became even more oppressive. Water was abundant, but the troops and camp followers were still on short rations of food. The price of grain was enormously high, and there was no chance of the magazines being replenished until the fields were ripe for harvest.

It was not until nearly three weeks after possession was taken of the capital that a force was despatched under Brigadier Sale in pursuit of the princes—a grievous mistake; for Shah Soojah had entered Candahar on the day they left, and as they were greatly encumbered by their baggage train, the ladies of the harems, and a host of camp followers, they might easily have been overtaken; whereas, after their escape, they became the centre of intrigues against the Ameer.

In June the harvest ripened, large quantities of grain were bought up by the commissariat, and preparations began for the advance to Cabul. Candahar was quiet and apathetic. So far no signs were visible of any enthusiasm for their new ruler among the people. Not only did none of the neighbouring chiefs come in to pay their allegiance, but the Shah's orders were everywhere disregarded. Marauding bands harassed and sometimes attacked convoys coming up; and even close to the city it was dangerous for the soldiers to move many hundred yards beyond the limits of their camps. The health of the troops was far from good. The plains of Candahar, fertile as they are, are unhealthy, as water can be found everywhere six or seven feet below the surface. The native troops suffered comparatively little, but the European soldiers were attacked by dysentery, jaun-

dice, and fever, and large numbers were carried off by these diseases.

At the end of June the necessary amount of grain was accumulated by the arrival of a large caravan from Mooltan. The army was now to cut itself entirely free from its former lines of supplies, and would have to depend solely upon the country for food, as the ever-increasing boldness of the Beloochees in the Bolan Pass, and of the Afghan marauders between Quettah and Candahar, had made it impossible for convoys, unless very strongly guarded, to make their way up.

The advance began at two o'clock on the morning of the 28th, and four hours later, after passing through a fertile district, the troops encamped at the village of Killa Azim. Here they obtained barley for their animals, and peasants from other villages brought in an abundance of chopped straw for the camels. At midnight the trumpet sounded, and an hour later the army moved forward again as far as Kheil. Four days' further march brought them to Kelat-i-Ghilzye, the chief town of the Ghilzye tribes. Two or three hundred of their horsemen galloped away as the troops approached.

Marching ten miles a day, the army followed the valley of the Turnak, which afforded an ample supply of water for all their needs. The country was mountainous and desolate, the dreariness being only broken by small villages with their orchards and patches of cultivated ground. Grain was brought in in abundance. The force was now far above the plain, the heat ceased to be oppressive even in the middle of the day, and the mornings and evenings were delightfully cool. Nevertheless, the number of sick increased, owing to the bad quality of the flour and the absence of vegetables. The country now became more thickly populated, little villages, with the fortified dwellings of their chiefs, being

thickly scattered about. The hostile tribesmen followed the march on both flanks, and many skirmishes took place; on one occasion the Ghilzye marauders made an attack on the line of march, but were driven off with heavy loss. On the 17th a nephew of the Ameer rode in with fifteen followers. He had gone to Ghuznee with his brother to aid in its defence, but suspicions being entertained by Mohummed Hyder, the governor, of their fidelity, his brother was seized and put to death, and he himself only escaped a similar fate by flight.

As they approached Ghuznee, Sir Alexander Burnes said to Angus: "Mr. Campbell, I shall be glad if you will resume your Afghan costume and ride to-morrow at daybreak with a party of six of Hajee Khan Kakur's men, and ascertain whether the enemy are in strength outside the fortress and intend to oppose our approach. If they do, we shall leave the baggage here under a strong guard and proceed to attack them. If they retire into the fortress, we shall advance as we have been doing, for possibly the siege may last some time, and it would be as well to take our ammunition and stores with us. Will you undertake that mission? I do not wish you, of course, to approach the enemy very closely. They will naturally take you for a party coming to join them, and will pay no attention to you. Half a mile will be near enough for you to go to the fortress. The disguise is only necessary because they too may have parties out, and should any come suddenly upon you, you would pass without suspicion or question; and indeed should you be stopped, your knowledge of the language is quite good enough to pass in any case. I have requested Hajee Khan to choose well-mounted men. We shall remain here to-morrow, and the general will send out a troop of cavalry to meet you on your return half-way between this and Ghuznee, so that should you be pursued, you will know that you will meet

with succour before going many miles. The fortress itself is some twelve miles from this camp."

"I will undertake it willingly, Sir Alexander."

Accordingly on the following morning Angus set out. Azim asked leave to accompany him, but he refused.

"Your horse is not a very fast one," he said. "It is a good beast, but we may have to ride for our lives, and you would soon be left behind. It is not a dangerous expedition, but in a country like this there is always the possibility of a surprise.'

After riding for two miles the fortress of Ghuznee was seen. It was situated on a high rock and surrounded by a wall of great height and strength, and was regarded by the Afghans as absolutely impregnable. As they approached, and could make out the strength of the fortifications, it seemed to Angus that, except by famine, it would be next to impossible to capture it. The general had left the few heavy cannon he had brought with him at Candahar because of the extreme difficulty of getting transport, and the light field-pieces could make but small impression indeed on these massive walls. When he approached within a mile he halted. There were no signs of any Afghan force in front of it. It was, of course, possible that they might sally out when they saw the army approaching, but at present there was nothing to show that they meant to do so. He was about to turn, when he was suddenly seized from behind, and in a moment his hands were bound tightly to his side by the sashes of two of his escort. The Afghans burst into a shout of triumph.

"Infidel dog," one said, "did you think because Hajee Khan Kakur is a traitor that all his men are also. You came to see Ghuznee. You shall see the inside as well as the outside.'

Angus was brave, but a shudder ran through him as he thought of the fate that awaited him. The Afghans never spared those who fell into their hands, and fortunate were those who were speedily killed, for in many cases they were tortured before they were done to death. It had never occurred to him to doubt for a moment the good faith of the men who accompanied him; and yet, now he thought over it, such a possibility should have been foreseen, since there was no reason why the men should be traitors to their race, although for the moment they had obeyed their commander's orders and ridden with him into the British camp. They might even have remained faithful to him had not this opportunity of rejoining their countrymen presented itself. Even in the midst of his own deadly peril he was glad to think that, by his refusal to allow Azim to accompany him, he had saved him from the fate that awaited himself.

He knew well that no entreaties would avail to soften the heart of the Afghan commander, and determined that, whatever came, he would maintain a firm countenance and meet his fate bravely. The gate of the fortress stood open. The men as they entered said a few words to the guards stationed there.

"We were forced," they said, "to accompany the traitor Hajee Khan Kakur to the camp of the infidel, but we have taken the first opportunity to desert, and have brought with us this man, who is one of their officers, as a prisoner."

"Why trouble to bring him as a prisoner?"

"We thought that Mohummed Hyder would like to question him, and are bringing him here to show that we are true men."

Climbing a steep road, they entered a great courtyard. Here they dismounted, and their leader, a sub-officer, went

forward to the governor's house, followed by two others, between whom Angus walked. The leader entered, the others remained outside until he returned.

"Follow me with the captive," he said, "Mohummed Hyder will speak to him."

A minute later Angus stood before the governor. He was seated on a divan, and several other chiefs of importance were standing or sitting round.

"They tell me," the governor said, "that you can speak our tongue?"

"I can do so," Angus said quietly.

"Where did you learn it?"

"In Herat, where I fought during the siege, against the Persians."

"And now you come hither as a spy?"

"Not as a spy. I came here only to view the fortress from a distance."

"Is it true that the kafirs are bringing no big guns with them?"

As the governor was doubtless well informed as to the strength of the British army and the number of its guns, Angus felt that there could be no harm in answering the question.

"They are not," he said.

"How do they intend to take Ghuznee? Will they fly over the walls or burrow through the rock?" the governor said scoffingly. "Are they madmen, who think they can tear down the walls of Ghuznee with their finger-nails?"

"I know nothing of the plans of the general," Angus replied. "But the British have taken many strong places in India when it seemed that it could not be done."

"They will not take Ghuznee. When the first shot is fired at its walls we will throw over to them your head and your limbs, to show that we despise them and mock their

foolish effort. Take him away, Yakoob. Do you see him safely bestowed."

Angus was led to a cell in one of the turrets on the wall. His weapons had been taken from him when he was first captured, and when he reached the prison his arms were unbound by the leader of the band, who carried off the sashes to the men to whom they belonged. A massive door was closed behind them, and Angus heard two heavy bolts shot—a proof that the tower was often used as a prison. Listening, he heard another door at the foot of the turret closed and bolted. The window was a mere loophole, but it commanded a view of the road by which he had been brought up. The cell was circular in shape, and some ten feet in diameter; it was absolutely bare. Angus stood for some little time looking through the loophole. It was three feet wide on the inner side, but narrowed to six inches at the outlet; the wall was more than two feet thick, and of solid stone.

"It is evident that there is no possibility of escape," he said aloud as he turned away from the loophole. "Even if I could widen the hole so to be able to creep through, there is a fall of a hundred feet or so; and there is nothing of which a rope could be made. I have my knife," he said, "fortunately they did not think of looking in my pockets; but though it has a good long blade, and I might at the end sell my life as dearly as possible, and force them to kill me, it can be of no earthly use here, for there is nothing to cut except that rough plank in the corner, which was, I suppose, brought up for some purpose or other and forgotten."

The day passed slowly. No one came near him until, just as the sun was setting, two soldiers came in bringing a jug of water and some bread. Angus had little sleep that night. He dozed off occasionally, but the hardness of the stone

floor and the cold speedily roused him, and he was glad indeed when daylight returned and the sun shone out. An hour later, when looking from his prison window, he perceived a party of horsemen. Long before he could distinguish their figures he made sure that they were British troops, from the fact that two or three rode ahead, and the rest, evidently an escort, in a close body behind them. They approached within musket-shot. As soon as they did so a fire of matchlocks broke out from the walls. They drew off a little, and then turned and rode off. There was no doubt that they were a reconnoitring party, who had ridden forward to ascertain the best spot for an attack.

Two hours later three regiments of infantry came up, followed by a battery. The object of their approach was to discover whether Ghuznee was held in force, for reports had reached the camp that the greater portion of the garrison had retired. It answered its purpose, for the guns of the fortress opened fire, and for an hour there was an exchange of shot between them and the battery. The object of the reconnaissance being fulfilled, the British returned to their camp. Not until five o'clock was any further movement perceptible; then Angus saw a long dark line ascending the pass. On reaching its head the column made a wide detour, so as to keep beyond the range of the guns of the fortress, and then entered a rocky and difficult country to the east. As he knew that the gates had all been walled up with masonry with the exception of that through which the road from Cabul entered it, he had no doubt that it was intended to encamp on that side, thus cutting off the fortress from relief by the army assembled under another of the Ameer's sons, and at the same time preventing the flight of the garrison. As long as it was light the column was still passing on—a long line of baggage waggons and native followers, guarded by bodies of troops against any sortie

that might be made. During the night occasional shots were fired from the fortress, and at various points of the plain and on the surrounding hills fires raised gave indications of gatherings of tribesmen.

It had indeed been a painful and difficult march. Several streams and water-courses swollen by rain had had to be crossed, but with enormous exertions the whole force was established, and on the following morning tents were erected along the position chosen. Sir John Keane, accompanied by General Cotton, ascended the heights, took a survey of the fortress, and decided upon the plan of attack. At two o'clock in the afternoon a body of Afghan horse suddenly attacked the camp in the rear, but were beaten off by our own cavalry. Angus heard the outburst of firing, and concluded that the governor would ere long carry out his threat. He had no idea what the commander-in-chief's plan was, but he felt certain that the attack when made would be sudden and sharp, and would be in the nature of a surprise, for in no other way did it seem possible that a force, however strong, could without artillery capture the place. In that case there was just a posibility that in the excitement of the moment his existence would be forgotten.

"At any rate," he said to himself, "I will do what I can to defer the moment of my execution. I don't suppose it will be of the smallest use, but as I have nothing else to do, I will cut some wedges, and as soon as the attack begins in earnest I will jam them in round the door."

For the rest of the day he occupied himself in cutting strips of wood off the plank and fashioning wedges, of which he made about four dozen, the work sufficing to keep his thoughts from dwelling upon his probable fate. He concealed all these in his clothes; then he cut off a stout piece of plank and fashioned it into the form of a short thick bat, with which to drive the wedges into their place.

Then he laid the plank in its place again, with the freshly-cut side against the wall, swept up the chips, and threw them out of the loophole. He thought it probable that Sir John Keane would attack without any delay, as it was all-important to capture the citadel before the relieving army from Cabul and the forces of three or four great chiefs which were also in the neighbourhood could join hands and attack him in the rear, while the powerful garrison sallied out and fell upon him in front.

CHAPTER IX

JUST IN TIME

THE plan of the British general for the capture of Ghuznee was a bold one. He knew that his little guns could make no impression upon the walls, and that it would take weeks before it would be possible to effect a breach. His idea was to blow in the gate and to pour his troops in through the opening. His plans were admirably laid. At midnight six companies of infantry established themselves in the gardens to the right and left of the spot where the assaulting column were to take up their position, ready to advance as soon as the gate was blown in. Two hours later three companies of a native regiment made a detour and took up a position to the north of the fortress. The field artillery took up their post on a height. At three o'clock in the morning the infantry on the north opened a musketry fire. At the same moment the artillery on the hills began a brisk cannonade, while a camel battery directed its fire against the walls. The guns of the fortress at once replied, and the walls were fringed with the musketry fire.

It was still an hour to daylight when Captain Thompson, of the Royal Engineers, with a party of his men, crept forward to the gate, carrying with them nine hundred pounds of gunpowder in twelve sacks.

The movement was altogether unobserved by the garrison, who had been taken completely by surprise by the sudden fire. The night had been exceptionally favourable for the attempt. The wind blew so strongly that the tramp of the columns and the sound of the wheels of the guns failed to reach the ears of the sentries on the walls. When the fire broke out the Afghans at once burned numbers of blue lights to endeavour to obtain a clear view of the attacking force; but the light failed to pierce the darkness, and the fireworks burned but fitfully owing to the force of the gale. They therefore distributed themselves along the whole circuit of walls instead of concentrating upon the point where the attack was about to take place.

The Engineers had done their work admirably. They crept silently along the causeway which afforded a passage across the moat, and then up the steep ascent which led to the gate, unnoticed by those who manned the loopholes. Two minutes sufficed to place the sacks in position. The fuse was then fired, and the party ran back to such cover as they could find. At this moment the Afghans lit a large and brilliant blue light immediately over the gate, but before they could obtain any idea of what was passing below the explosion took place. The gate was blown to pieces, and masses of masonry and fractured beams fell into the passage beyond. Then a bugle was sounded by the Engineers, and the storming party rushed down and crept into the dark, blocked-up passage. Here they were fiercely opposed. The Afghans had rallied almost instantly from their first surprise, and rushed down to defend the passage. A desperate struggle took place in the dark, but British valour was tri-

umphant, and the four companies of the 2nd and 17th Regiments fought their way into the interior of the fortress.

Had they been at once supported by the column behind them, commanded by Brigadier-general Sale, the capture of Ghuznee would have been comparatively bloodless; but as he was advancing he met one of the Engineer officers, who had been terribly bruised and injured by the explosion. Upon being questioned, the latter said that the gate had been blown in, but that the passage was blocked with the ruins. As in that case it would have been madness to advance, the general ordered the retreat to be sounded. The call was heard by the leading companies, but not obeyed. Instead of the troops retreating, they halted irresolutely, rather than carry out an order the most unwelcome that can be given to British soldiers. Fortunately another Engineer officer soon came along and assured the brigadier that, although the passage was greatly blocked, the storming party had made their way through; whereupon the column at once rushed forward. The delay, however, had given the garrison time to rally, and large numbers had run down from the wall to take part in the fight. Many, however, despairing of successful resistance now that their assailants had won their way into the town, allowed the storming party to pass and then attempted to escape through the gateway. But as they did so, General Sale with the head of his column arrived, and another desperate fight took place among the ruins of the gate.

The general himself was cut down, and his assailant endeavoured to complete his work. Sale succeeded in grasping his sword hand, but, weakened by his wound, must have been overpowered had not an officer run up and severely wounded the Afghan. The struggle continued, but the general managed to gain his feet and cut down his assailant.

The column was a long time in passing over the heap of

ruins, now further encumbered by wounded and dead. As soon as they had entered, the reserve, who had been suffering from the fire of the Afghans still on the walls, followed them, and while General Sale's division ascended the steep path that led to the citadel, which rose far above the rest of the fortress, the reserve began the work of clearing out the Afghans from the houses. Large numbers of Afghans had taken refuge here as the troops entered, and these, rushing out, flung themselves upon the troops with the fury of despair. Many of these who had first entered, exhausted by their exertions, were with the wounded sitting in the courtyard at the foot of the citadel. Upon these the fanatics rushed, cutting and slashing with their keen tulwars alike at the soldiers who started to their feet, the wounded on the ground, and their own horses, who, mad with terror, were galloping wildly over the courtyard. A series of desperate hand-to-hand conflicts were waged until the last of the Afghans were shot or bayoneted. The walls were cleared with little difficulty, but many soldiers were shot as they passed through the narrow streets of the native town. All resistance ceased at a quarter past five. Thus in two hours and a quarter after the first shot was fired, a fortress deemed impregnable and garrisoned by three thousand five hundred men was captured.

Ghuznee had been provisioned for six months, and so certain was Mohummed Hyder of the ability of the place to hold out that he had brought with him all the ladies of his zenana. In spite of the desperate nature of the fighting, not one of the Afghans who surrendered was injured, nor was the slightest insult offered to the ladies of the zenana or the women in the native town. The troops who had ascended to the citadel found the gates open, the Afghan prince having lost all hope as soon as he found the lower fortress in possession of the British. He was found hiding

in disguise, and was brought before Shah Soojah. The latter magnanimously said to him: "What has been has been; you have deserved evil at my hands, but you have this day behaved like a brave man. I forgive thee the past; go in peace." The young prince was then handed over to Sir Alexander Burnes for safe custody.

The success had been cheaply purchased. Only seventeen non-commissioned officers and privates had been killed, and eighteen officers and a hundred and forty-seven men wounded. Of the Afghans, five hundred and fourteen bodies were buried next day; more than a hundred fugitives were killed outside the walls; upwards of a thousand horses, a great number of camels and mules, vast quantities of provisions, ammunition, and arms fell into the hands of the conquerors, together with more than fifteen hundred prisoners. Over a thousand made their escape.

At the first outburst of firing Angus had sprung to his feet; as the fight increased in fury he was certain that a night attack was in progress, and he at once proceeded to drive in the wedges he had prepared. Just as he had completed this he heard the dull roar of the explosion, followed by loud and excited shouts, but the noise of the gale prevented him from catching the words. He had no doubt, however, that either the gate had been blown in or that a mine had been driven into the wall, and that the explosion of an immense charge of powder had effected a breach. Then came the sound of a heavy and continuous rattle of musketry. The cannon of the fortress opened fire, while those of the besiegers answered. By the occasional fall of masses of masonry, and the screams of women, he had no doubt that the British artillery were now directing their fire against the citadel, in order to add to the confusion among the defenders of the fortress.

Presently he heard a rush of feet up the staircase, then the bolts of the door were pulled back, and a yell of rage and surprise arose as the door did not yield to the push against it. The staircase was a very narrow one, and but one person could mount at a time. As it terminated at the door, one man only could use his strength against it, and Angus felt perfectly sure that it would need a much greater pressure than this to force it open. He had already propped the plank against it, and stood with his foot at the lower end to prevent it from slipping. The man next to the door, finding that it did not yield, began to hammer with the hilt of his sword, but soon desisted, finding that his blows did not even shake it. There was a confused sound of talking, and then silence for a few minutes; then there was a renewed noise, and a heavy blow was struck at the door. Evidently a large block of wood had been brought up; but this did not greatly alarm Angus. The staircase was a circular one, and at most but two men could work the battering-ram, which on account of the confined space was necessarily short.

This proving unsucessful, there was again silence. After an interval came blows of a sharper sound, an axe of some sort was being used. During the lulls of the wind the sounds of the struggle below could be plainly heard, and as it was now dawn Angus could have seen what was going on had not the loophole been on the opposite side, but from the sharpness of the sound he had no doubt that the firing was in the courtyard, and that his countrymen had effected an entrance. The chopping went on regularly. The door was thick and strong, and it was half an hour before the edge of the axe first showed through it; another five minutes and a hole a foot wide appeared some four feet from the ground. At this rate it would be some time before an

opening large enough for a man to pass through could be made. He took down the prop, and thrust it suddenly with all his force through the hole, striking the man who was wielding the axe full in the face.

There was a terrible cry, mingled with yells of rage from the others. Presently a pistol was thrust through the hole and fired; he had expected this, and had stood back. Again and again shots were fired. It was evident that there was an unwillingness on the part of his assailants to try the axe again. Presently he heard a shout from below. The words came up distinctly, "Mohummed Hyder's orders are that the attack is to cease," and Angus felt that he was saved. The prince, indeed, seeing that all was lost, had sent an officer in great haste to put a stop to the attack on his prisoner's cell. He no longer thought of carrying out his former intentions. The British army was not after all an impotent enemy to be insulted, but a victorious one to be appeased, and as soon as he was informed of the attack on his prisoner's cell he had sent off to put a stop to it. It had not been made by his orders, but was the act of the soldiers on the wall near it, who, seeing that the British had entered, had determined to take vengeance upon the captive.

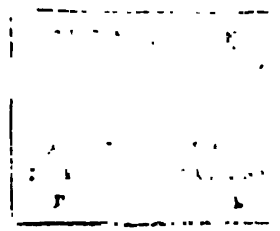
A few minutes later Angus heard the triumphant cheers of the troops as they poured in through the open gate of the citadel.

It was another hour before the contest in the courtyard below and on the walls of the fortress came to an end. Shortly afterwards he heard steps approaching, and through the hole in the door saw a British officer coming up the stair; behind him was Azim.

"I am glad indeed to see you, Campbell," the officer said, as he caught sight of his face. "We had all given you up as dead when we found that none of your escort came back;



HE TOOK DOWN THE PROP, AND THRUST IT SUDDENLY WITH ALL HIS FORCE THROUGH THE HOLE.



but your boy, on questioning the prisoners, found out that you were confined here, and came at once to tell me. I see by the state of the door that you have been standing a siege. Are you uninjured?"

"Yes, my rascally troops seized me suddenly and brought me here. I will tell you about it as soon as I have unfastened the door."

"It is the first time I ever heard of a prison door having bolts on the inside."

"They are not bolts, as you will see directly."

It took some minutes to get all the wedges out. Macgregor then entered and shook Angus warmly by the hand, while Azim threw himself on his knees, and seizing his master's hand kissed it again and again, tears of joy streaming down his cheeks.

"Where in the world did you get these wedges?" Macgregor asked.

"I cut them out of this plank. It took me all day yesterday to make them and this mallet. How the plank came here I don't know, but it certainly saved my life."

"That and your wits, Campbell. It was a capital idea, first-rate. I see there is blood on the staircase."

"The plank came in useful again. I used it as a battering-ram on the fellow who was chopping, and as I caught him full in the face, the blood is accounted for. As you see by the opposite wall, they fired a few shots through the hole afterwards, but of course I took good care to be out of the line of fire."

"Well, come along. Sir Alexander has been asking about you, but could get no information, and it might have been some time before you were set free had it not been for your boy."

On going down into the body of the citadel, Angus was most warmly greeted by Sir Alexander Burnes and the other

officers who knew him, for all supposed that he had been murdered. He explained to his chief why his life had been spared.

"You had a narrow escape indeed," the latter said, "for I have no doubt whatever that the Afghan would have carried out his threat had we attacked in a regular way. It is quite in accordance with their barbarous customs. But I certainly wonder that they did not kill you when we entered the fortress."

Macgregor then told the manner in which Angus had converted his little cell into a fort, and had resisted successfully the attacks made upon it.

"A very narrow escape indeed, Mr. Campbell," Sir Alexander Burnes said. "It was fortunate indeed that that piece of wood had been left in the cell; but the idea of cutting wedges from it and fastening the door would not have occurred to everyone. It was a most happy thought, and certainly was the means of saving your life. It was a treacherous business indeed of Hajee Khan Kakur, for I have no doubt that he was the concocter of the plot. He has given us the strongest grounds for suspicion ever since we left Candahar, and has continually been making excuses for lagging behind. We have strong reason for believing that if we had failed here, he would at once have turned against us."

"I do not think he knew of this, sir. When I was seized, the trooper said. 'Do you think that because our chief is a traitor we are traitors too?'"

"These fellows are very crafty, Mr. Campbell, and Hajee has a special reputation that way, having before now turned traitor in spite of promises and vows. He may very well have instructed one of his men to say this, in order that if, contrary to all probability, you ever rejoined the army, he

himself might be shielded by your repeating this speech. We have never put any trust in him since he joined us, though of course it was politic to seem to do so, as other chiefs might follow his example. He was questioned very sharply as to the orders he had given his men when you did not return that afternoon. Of course he swore by the Prophet that he had chosen men in whom he had the greatest confidence, which was, I have no doubt, true. However, as it was possible that you and they might have fallen into an ambush, the matter was dropped for the time. But our suspicions gained ground when, as we came up here, no signs of a fight were discovered, no bodies either of men or horses, and I intended to reopen the matter as soon as things were a little settled down. Well, I can assure you I am heartily glad to see you back again safe and sound, and I shall not fail to report the matter to Sir John Keane, and tell him how cleverly you escaped the fate intended for you."

The army remained for a week at Ghuznee while preparations were being made for converting the fortress into a base from which further operations could be carried on. It was thought well to pause, so that the full effects of the disaster might be felt throughout the country before the advance began again. The fall of Ghuznee had indeed entirely disarranged the plan of campaign that had been decided upon by Dost Mahomed. The fortress had been provisioned for six months, and it was confidently believed that it could resist all attacks for that time. With the approach of winter, the position of a besieging army would be desperate. The cold would be intense, they would be surrounded on all sides by swarms of fierce tribesmen, would be unable to obtain provisions in the country round, and must either retire through the passes they had ascended, to Candahar,

or be forced by famine to surrender. In the former case, the disaster that afterwards occurred in endeavouring to retire from Cabul would probably have befallen them.

This plan was entirely brought to naught by the fall of Ghuznee, and six days later the brother of Dost Mahomed arrived in camp with an offer from the Ameer to surrender the government to Shah Soojah, on condition that he himself should, as the head of the Barukzyes, fill the hereditary office of wuzeer, or prime minister. As this would have placed the whole power of the state in his hands, the offer was refused, and on the 31st of July the army resumed its march. After three days' march, they learned that the Kuzzilbashes had mutinied. This body of troops were of Persian descent, and had for very many years formed an important part of the military power of Cabul, and held a position similar to that of the Janizaries of Constantinople and the Mamelukes of Egypt. Under but very slight control, they were constantly causing trouble by their insolence and exactions, and they now showed that they entertained no feeling either of loyalty or gratitude towards the dynasty which they served.

In spite of the exhortations of the Ameer, they insisted upon his granting them a discharge from his service, and as it was evident that the news from Ghuznee had so much dispirited the whole army that no reliance whatever could be placed on their fidelity, the unfortunate monarch was obliged to allow the Kuzzilbashes to disband, and the rest of the army to disperse, and to take to the mountains as a fugitive, accompanied only by a small party of personal followers. A force was at once sent in pursuit of him; but as the following of the traitor, Hajee Khan, formed the principal part of this force, the double-faced chief, who desired to make himself safe whatever turn affairs might take, so contrived that Dost Mahomed and his party were

not overtaken. In the meantime the main force marched forward to Cabul wholly unopposed. Twenty-two guns were found abandoned at the spot where the Ameer's army had dispersed. These, placed in a strong defile, and supported by a large force of tribesmen, might have long resisted our advance had the Kuzzilbashes and other Afghan horsemen swept round on our rear, and although British valour might have finally succeeded, it could only have been after a terrible struggle. But now the Ameer was a fugitive, the guns were in our hands, the Kuzzilbashes and native tribesmen had come in to salute their new ruler, and nothing remained but to enter the capital in triumph.

The entry took place on the 7th of August. The ceremony was an imposing one. Shah Soojah, after an exile of thirty years, rode at the head of the cortege, on a white charger with golden trappings. He wore a jewelled coronet, his arms and garments were ornamented with precious stones, and his waist encircled with a broad girdle of gold encrusted with rubies and emeralds. Accompanying him were the commander-in-chief, and Mr. Macnaghten and Sir Alexander Burnes, who were in full diplomatic dress. Two of the Shah's sons and a few of the principal chiefs rode behind him with a number of staff officers in full uniform. Following him came the army that had performed so long and difficult a march to place him on his throne. The surrounding country traversed was rich and fertile in the extreme, and almost covered with orchards of peaches and other fruits; under these crops of all sorts grew luxuriantly. On the eminences commanding the plain immense numbers of tribesmen assembled to witness the martial display.

On entering the city, the victors found the inhabitants clustered in the streets through which they passed to the royal residence in the Bala Hissar, a great citadel situated on a hill commanding the town, and so strongly fortified that

it would have been difficult to capture it unless by the aid of a regular siege train. The aspect of the inhabitants was perfectly peaceful; there were no shouts or exclamations of enthusiasm, but it was evident from the expression of satisfaction on their faces that the majority were well satisfied with the termination of the rule of the Barukzyes, whose exactions had pressed heavily upon them.

Dost Mahomed himself was popular. He was affable and kindly in disposition; his decisions on all matters brought before him were just and fair; he was accessible to all having complaints to bring before him; and had he possessed a body of trustworthy infantry to overawe the marauding Kuzzilbashes and the semi-independent chiefs, there can be no doubt that his rule would have been a wise and beneficial one. Shah Soojah was the reverse of his rival. Haughty and arrogant, he regarded and treated with contempt his new subjects, seldom granted audience, or troubled himself in any way with their affairs, rarely went abroad, and remained in almost constant seclusion in his palace.

The shops of Cabul excited the admiration of the officers and men of the British force. Probably nowhere else in the world could such a display of fruit have been collected. Here were piles of peaches equal to the finest product of English hothouses, grapes of five varieties, rosy apples, juicy pears, several delicious kinds of melons, almonds, pistachio nuts, walnuts, quinces, cherries, and red and white mulberries, and vegetables of all kinds. The butchers' shops were cleanly and well arranged; there were public ovens, in which loaves, and the cakes of which the Afghans are extremely fond, were baking when the force entered. In the potters' shops were jars and drinking vessels of all kinds; Afghan, Persian, and Russian cloths, cloaks, furs of many kinds, sets of china and Dresden porcelain in the shops of the wealthier traders; and behind these open shops

were inner apartments with very fine and costly shawls, silks, precious stones, valuable carpets, and tea imported by way of Bokhara. Conspicuous were the shops of manufacturers of swords and daggers, and makers of scabbards and belts, shields and chain armour, and even of bookbinders, who manufactured covers for manuscript copies of Persian poems and stories. Unfortunately for the *moral* of the army, there were also manufactories of spirits. Since leaving Candahar no spirit rations had been served out, and the troops had greatly benefited in health during their arduous work by the privation, but the power to purchase vile spirits at a very low price now tempted many into drinking to intoxication, and lowered at once their health and discipline.

Mr. Macnaghten and his staff had a fine building in the Bala Hissar allotted to them. Sir Alexander Burnes with his assistants occupied a house in the city. The position of Burnes was an unsatisfactory one. He had a right to expect that after his previous residence in Cabul he would be appointed British resident there, and he had only accepted a secondary position upon the understanding that Macnaghten's appointment was a temporary one. He had on the way up rendered much valuable assistance, but he had no strictly defined duties. His opinion was seldom asked, and if given, was wholly disregarded. For this he was himself somewhat to blame. His temperament was a changeable one. At times he was full of enthusiasm and saw everything in the rosiest light; at other times he was depressed and despondent, and came to be regarded as a prophet of evil. Having no serious work to occupy his mind, he worried over trifles, exaggerated the importance of the bazaar rumours, and was often filled with the gloomiest anticipations.

The war had been undertaken altogether in opposition to

his advice. He had been most favourably impressed with Dost Mahomed, and his remonstrances against the attempt to force Shah Soojah on the Afghans had been so strong and persistent, that the home government, in defending themselves from the public indignation excited by subsequent disaster, even went the length of suppressing some of his despatches and garbling others, after he was no longer alive to proclaim the falsification.

Once at Cabul, his opportunities for doing useful service came to an end. Macnaghten, who was always sanguine to an extent that, in the light of subsequent events, seemed to border on insanity, was all-powerful with the new Ameer. The expression of any opinion which ran counter to his own was in the highest degree distasteful to him, and it was only in negotiations for the supply of the troops, and with the petty chiefs, that Burnes and his staff found any employment.

Although Pushtoo was the language of the country-people who came in with goods, the inhabitants of Cabul almost universally spoke Persian, and Angus Campbell and Azim found themselves quite at home among them.

On the 3rd of September, a force under Colonel Wade, which had advanced through the Khyber Pass, arrived at Cabul. It was a mixed body composed principally of Pathans and Sikhs. It had met with comparatively small resistance, but had rendered valuable service, as a large force had been detached from Dost Mahomed's army to oppose its advance, and thus greatly weakened the army with which the Ameer had intended to meet the British advance from Candahar. The Afghan force had been recalled in haste after the news of the fall of Ghuznee, but had not arrived until after the disbandment of the Ameer's army and his flight to the Bamian Pass, when it had also broken up, and Wade was therefore able to reach Cabul without opposition.

It was now necessary to decide what should be done with the army of occupation. Macnaghten was pressing by a constant succession of letters that large reinforcements should be sent up in order to win back for Shah Soojah the territories that had once formed part of the Afghan empire. He urged that in order to check Russian aggression an army should not only occupy Herat, but should extend its operations until it became paramount at Bokhara; while, on the other hand, Peshawur and the territory wrested from Afghanistan by the Sikhs should be reconquered, and the Sikh nation, which was becoming more and more hostile to us, should be brought into subjection. But fortunately Lord Auckland, now freed from the pernicious influence of Macnaghten and surrounded by discreet counsellors, was by no means disposed to turn a favourable ear to these fantastic projects. The cost of the army of occupation was a heavy drain on the revenue of India, and so far from any assistance being rendered by Afghanistan, Shah Soojah was constantly clamouring for subsidies to enable him to maintain his position. The absence of so many troops was also much felt in India, for they were greatly needed on the frontiers of the Beloochees as well as those of the Sikhs. Macnaghten had so persistently asserted that Shah Soojah was personally popular with the Afghans, that it was decided that only a comparatively small force was needed to uphold his authority in case Dost Mahomed should make an effort to recover his throne, and orders were given that the greater portion of the Bombay army should march down through the Kojuk and Bolan Passes, and most of the Bengal troops through the Khyber, leaving some six regiments, with a proportion of artillery, at Cabul, with garrisons at Ghuznee, Candahar, Quettah, and Jellalabad.

Macnaghten in vain remonstrated and entreated. It was settled that the movement should begin at the end of Sep-

tember, so that the troops could regain the plains before winter set in in earnest. September passed quietly. The climate at this time was perfect, and the troops enjoyed the rest, with the abundance of fruit and vegetables. There were reviews and races. Shah Soojah established an order of knighthood, and held a grand durbar, at which the principal officers were invested, with great ceremony, with the insignia of the new order. On the 18th of the month the Bombay column started on its march, but news having been brought down from the force that had occupied the Bamian Pass, that Dost Mahomed was collecting a formidable army, the authorities were induced to maintain a great portion of the Bengal force round Cabul. Great difficulties arose with reference to provisioning these troops through the winter. There was abundant accommodation for them in the Bala Hissar and its citadel, but Shah Soojah strongly objected to the presence of a large body of troops there. Macnaghten, with his usual weakness, gave way.

On the 15th of October Sir John Keane, with that portion of the Bengal force that was to return, set out. The Ameer left two days later, to spend the winter in the more genial climate of Jellalabad, and Macnaghten accompanied him. Sanguine as he was, he could not help feeling uneasy at the situation. The British occupation had greatly benefited the merchants and traders, the farmers and cultivators of Cabul, but it had seriously injured the poorer portion of the community. The natural result of so large an army, well supplied with money, being stationed in the city, was to raise the price of all articles of consumption prodigiously, and to cause wide-spread discontent. The exactions of the native tax-collectors pressed heavily upon all the tribesmen. The British officers, by the terms of the treaty with Shah Soojah, were unable to interefere in any way with the internal affairs of the country; but when the natives revolted

against the unjust exactions it was they who were called upon to suppress them, consequently the infidel supporters of the Ameer became more and more hated by the people, and it was soon dangerous for them to go beyond the limits of their camps. The Ameer himself resented the state of subjection in which he considered that he was held, though he could not dispense with British bayonets and British money. Macnaghten left behind him experienced administrators. Burnes, Conolly, Leech, Todd, and Lord had all long acquaintance with the country, and if anyone could, under such circumstances, have reconciled the country to foreign occupation, they would have done so.

CHAPTER X

A MISSION

"I WISH that we had trustworthy news of what Dost Mahomed is doing," Sir Alexander Burnes said one morning when he and his assistants were talking over the work for the day. "Of course one hears from the Hindoo merchants what rumours are circulating, but these are so contradictory that they are not to be relied upon. One day it is said that Dost has retired to Bokhara, another that he has already gathered a formidable force. It is certain that if he does not recross the Bamian soon he will not give us any trouble till the spring, for I doubt whether even the Afghans, hardy as they are, could traverse the passes when winter has fairly set in. Still, it would be very useful to us to obtain some sort of inkling as to what his movements and intentions are. He may intend to make a bold stroke to recover his kingdom, he may wait until

there is a popular rising here. In the first case, our force here must be maintained at the present strength, and it would be well to warn Lord Auckland as soon as possible that next spring its strength must be increased rather than diminished. If, on the other hand, Dost depends upon a rising here rather than upon any force he may himself gather, there will be no occasion for more troops than we have, for these should suffice to crush any tribal rising."

"I should be happy to undertake the mission if you would confide it to me, sir," Angus said. "I travelled as a Persian without exciting suspicion, and I can do the same again. I might obtain a couple of horse-loads of Indian silk and cashmere goods, and travel as a Persian trader who has been settled here, but who, fearing that fresh disturbances might occur, had decided to make a trip himself to Bokhara with a view of establishing himself there. I see all trade is at present at a stand-still, as the northern traders dare not venture down here. The fact that I can also speak Pushtoo will, of course, be an advantage, and would seem to show that I had, as I gave out, resided here for some time."

"It would be a dangerous enterprise, Mr. Campbell."

"There would be a certain amount of danger in it, sir, but not, it seems to me, excessive—not more than I met in my journey from Herat. There is danger, as you have frequently said, even here; and at any rate, I am ready to take all risks if you think that the mission would be of utility."

"That it would certainly be, and I admit that no one would be more likely to carry it to a successful conclusion, but I fear that it would be impossible for you to return before the spring."

"I do not think that I could return across the mountains, but I might dispose of my goods to the Turkomans.

From what we hear, Dost Mahomed is either at Balkh or Kunduz, or possibly Tashkurgan, half-way between them. Balkh would, of course, be more convenient, for it is but a couple of days' journey to Kilif, on the other side of the Oxus. There I might dispose of my goods, and buy carpets and shawls of Bokhara; and then travel across the plains to Herat; thence, by the trade route, to Candahar; and so back through Ghuznee. That would, of course, be a long journey, but there would be no very lofty passes to traverse. I need hardly say that I should not enter Herat, as I might be recognized there; but there would be no fear of recognition elsewhere. As my servant is really a Persian, and has also picked up Pushtoo, he would greatly aid me in preserving my disguise. At any rate, I would rather be doing something than remaining here idle through the winter."

"Then I accept your offer, Mr. Campbell. The information you would give as to the feeling of the people on the other side of the mountains would be invaluable. I will myself question one or two of the Hindoo merchants as to the goods that are generally sent to Bokhara. I know, of course, that the bulk of that trade with India is carried on through Candahar and Herat, but it would be natural that a trader residing here and wishing to leave should prefer the direct route, however toilsome it might be. I should say easy loads for three animals would be sufficient, and as the merchandise would be of light materials, a considerable value could be carried by three horses. You will need a fourth for a small stock of provisions, for you will have to depend on yourselves until you are on the other side of the passes. You will require two men to look after the four horses. I will obtain two soldiers from one of the Pathan regiments. It would be dangerous for you to hire a man in the city; I will get a couple of men of approved fidelity.

They will, of course, be in native dress, and will pass as peasants hired for the journey by you. Four of you, well armed, should be able to give a good account of yourselves if you should fall in with any small party of freebooters, though that is more likely to happen on your return journey than on your way across the hills."

"Thank you, sir."

"Well, to-day is Monday; it will take two or three days to make all the preparations and get the sort of men you require. Would you be ready to start on Thursday?"

"Certainly, sir. As far as I and my man are concerned, we should be ready to start at a moment's notice, as there will be no difficulty in buying the clothes we require."

"Very well, then, it shall be settled for Thursday. I know I need not tell you to warn your servant to maintain absolute secrecy as to the fact that you are leaving the town."

Azim was greatly pleased when Angus told him of the intended expedition, for, having few duties to perform, he had found the time hang heavily on his hands, and was glad to hear that he was not to spend the long winter at Cabul. He purchased in the bazaars all the garments for his master and himself—high boots lined with fur, and cloaks of thick cloth similarly lined, and Afghan hats of black lamb's wool.

On Wednesday evening Sir Alexander Burnes said to Angus: "It is just as well that you did not make your start this morning, for there has been a sharp skirmish on the road ten miles off between a squadron of our cavalry and a party of Afghan horse. I hear the fellows fought well, but were driven off with considerable loss. I have seen the two men who have been selected to accompany you, they have both been some time in our service. Their colonel spoke highly to me of them. I explained to them the nature

of the duty on which they were going, and gave them the option of declining it, but said that if they carried it through successfully they would on their return receive a present of six months' pay and would at once be promoted. They accepted without hesitation, and I feel certain that you can rely upon them. They were recruited from the border tribes, which have ever held themselves independent of the Afghan factions, and have no sympathy whatever either with the Kuzzilbashes or Soojah himself, and care not a snap who rules over Afghanistan. If questioned, their story will be that they came up as camp followers with Colonel Wade's force, and that on arriving at Cabul their work with the army was at an end, and they took service with the Persian trader. All the goods and packs have been marked in Persian characters, with the prices they would fetch in Persia, and those at which they would probably sell at Bokhara; so that you will know how to carry on your trading without exciting suspicion either by asking too little or by demanding an unusual price. Each man will lead two horses, and I have provided rough ponies for them to ride. I think you will find that no detail has been neglected. I have had a thousand rupees sewn up in the saddle of your horse. I sent for one of the cavalry saddlers, and your man showed him which was your saddle. Another five hundred are sewn in the saddle of your servant in case of mishap. Here is a letter to Lieutenant Mackenzie, who commands the troop of horse artillery which is at Bamian with the Ameer's Ghoorka regiment. You may be questioned there, so without giving him any details I have simply requested him to allow the bearer and his party to pass on without question or interference."

The start was not made from the house of Sir Alexander Burnes, but from that of the Hindoo merchant from whom goods had been purchased. As there was nothing unusual in

a trader starting with some horse-loads of merchandise, no attention was attracted, and the party crossed the plain four miles farther up, and skirted the foot of the mountains until they reached the gorge through which the track—for it could not be called a road—led over the mountains to Bamian. They had decided to camp here, but they found that it was the scene of the previous day's combat. Dead horses and men were scattered about, and it was evident that the Afghans had been lying in ambush here, aware that at times parties of our cavalry rode some distance up the pass. They determined to go half a mile farther up the gorge, as there was no danger of disturbance by the Afghans, who, after their defeat on the previous day, were not likely to be in the neighbourhood.

After proceeding a quarter of a mile Angus, who was riding ahead, suddenly stopped his horse, hearing a deep groan. As the ground was strewn with rocks on either side of the track, he concluded at once that some poor fellow had crawled away to die, unnoticed by our cavalry returning from pursuit. Knowing what tortures he must be suffering from thirst he dismounted, and filling a pannikin from one of the skins, he bade Azim bring some fruit, and then made his way to the spot from which the sound proceeded. There, lying close under a rock, was a young Afghan, whose clothes showed that he was a chief of some rank. His eyes were closed, his face pallid and drawn, his lips black and cracked with thirst. Angus knelt beside him, and poured a few drops of water between his lips. This he repeated again and again.

The wounded man opened his eyes with a deep exclamation of thankfulness. Then his face darkened, and he said: "You meant kindly, good friend, but you have done me a cruel service. The worst had passed; I had sunk into un-



THERE, LYING CLOSE UNDER A ROCK, WAS A YOUNG AFGHAN.



consciousness, and should have passed into Paradise without more pain."

"Where are you wounded?" Angus asked. "Perhaps we can do something for you."

The Afghan slightly shook his head. "Nothing can be done for me," he said. "I have a musket-ball in my shoulder, and my right leg is broken above the knee."

"At any rate we can make you comfortable. We were going to camp a short way ahead, but we will now do so here."

"May Allah bless you, but it would be better to leave me to die at once."

"That I cannot do. Now, have a good drink of water, and then I will cut a melon into pieces for you to suck while we are preparing our camp."

The horses' loads were removed and the animals turned loose to graze on the grass growing among the rocks. Then the tent was erected and the Afghan carried into the shade of a high rock close by. By this time he was able to speak more strongly, and said: "You are Persian, I see, by your dress. How comes it that you have entered this lonely gorge with your pack-horses and your goods?"

"We are going to make our road to Bokhara. There are rumours of disaffection in Cabul, and if there is fighting the houses of the traders will be looted. Therefore I resolved to leave while I could, and am taking my Indian goods for sale there."

"It will be a terrible journey," the young chief said. "There is already snow in the upper passes. I wish you success. I shall think of your kindness as I lie here, and pray Allah to protect you. Before you go I pray you to carry me down to the edge of this stream, so that I may drink when I will."

"We will certainly do that, and give you a supply of fruit if we can do no better. Now we must look and see to your wounds. I can at least bandage them, and make you somewhat easier."

To his surprise Angus found no wounds in the leg. "I see no bullet mark," he said.

"No, the leg was broken in my fall. My men had fought well, but the Feringees were too strong for them, and we fled. I was riding in their rear, when a shot struck me in the shoulder. I fell from my horse, and when I found that my leg was broken I felt my end was at hand; but I heard no more shots nor any further sound of galloping horses, and I knew that by Allah's mercy they had ceased their pursuit. My horse had galloped on after the others, and my men might not notice that I had fallen until they had gone some distance, when they would probably conclude that I had been killed. I managed to crawl out of the road to the shelter of that rock where you found me, as the infidels might come up in the morning, and I would rather die quietly there than be shot down."

"They would not have injured you," Angus said. "They kill many in battle, but it is a rule with them never to touch an injured man; and had they come along they would have taken you back to their camp and have done all they could for you."

"I have heard that they were strange in that respect; but I did not think of it—my only wish was to die quietly and alone. I tried several times to crawl to the stream, but the agony was so great that I could not do it."

Angus while he was speaking was feeling the limb. "The first thing to do," he said, "is to bring the ends of the bone together; the operation will be painful, but it will greatly relieve your sufferings."

"Do as you will, stranger; Allah has sent you to my side, and what you do must be right."

"In the first place, I must prepare some splints to keep it in its place."

Leaving the Afghan, Angus searched among the bushes until he found a shrub which was thick enough for the purpose. He and Azim with their knives cut this down near the root, and then divided it into lengths, split each of these and smoothed the pieces until they were perfectly even. He then tore off several long strips of cloth to form bandages, and calling to the two men, he returned to the wounded Afghan. The patient was lifted into another position, where he could place his left foot against a rock.

"Now, chief," Angus said, "you must with that leg prevent yourself from being pulled forward; my servant will hold you round the body, so as to aid you; the other two men will take hold of your right leg and pull it, while as soon as it is sufficiently stretched I shall press the broken ends into their position. I am afraid that the pain will be very severe, but you will be much easier afterwards. At present the ends of the bones are tearing your flesh."

"An Afghan can bear pain," the chief said quietly; "do as you will."

"Now," Angus said to the soldiers, "take a firm hold above the ankle, and draw as steadily and quietly as you can, but with all your strength."

The resistance of the muscles was so great that it was only by exercising their utmost power that the men got them to yield. At last Angus felt the end of the bone on which he was pressing suddenly slip into its place. Then for the first time he looked round. No sound had escaped the Afghan's lips, but the agony had been so intense that he had fainted.

"Now, give me a long bandage, Azim; you need not hold him any longer. Double up a cloak or something and lift him and put it under him, so that I can pass the bandage round and round."

First a wad of thick material soaked in water was placed round the leg at the point of the fracture, and then bandage was added to bandage, until the limb down to the knee was surrounded by a casing half an inch thick; then the splints were applied, some reaching only down to the knee, others to the ankle. These were held in their place by the three assistants, while Angus again firmly bandaged them. The operation being completed, he dashed some water on the Afghan's face. The latter soon opened his eyes.

"It is all over, chief; the bones are in their place again, and if all goes well, in time the ends may knit firmly together."

"It is easier already," the chief said gratefully. "I no longer feel as if an evil spirit from Eblis were torturing me with a hot iron."

"I will now see to your shoulder. The wound has ceased bleeding; therefore I shall but sponge it with cold water and put a bandage on in case it should break out afresh."

This was soon done. Some cloths soaked in water were laid over the bandage, then some more fruit was given to the wounded man, and he was left in the shade, and the men set about cooking a meal. Angus from time to time went across to see him, and had the satisfaction in the evening of finding that he had fallen asleep.

"Now, Azim," he said when he returned, "the next thing to do is to settle what is to be done with him."

"I have been wondering that ever since we found him, master."

"There is a choice of two things: one is that I mount my horse, ride back to Cabul, report having found a wounded man, and ask that a party with a stretcher may be sent

out to fetch him in early in the morning; the other is to take him on with us."

Azim looked in surprise. "That would be very difficult, master."

"No doubt it would be difficult, but I think it might be done. There is no doubt that from his dress and appearance, and from the fact that he speaks excellent Persian, he is a chief of considerable standing. In that case his friendship might be invaluable to us, both on our way down to the frontier, and possibly in the future, which Sir Alexander Burnes regards as very threatening. It would be worth while, therefore, to make some sacrifice to carry him down to his friends. I would not do it if I thought the journey would harm him, but I believe the cold air of the mountains would be vastly better for him than the heat of the plains round Cabul. He may suffer somewhat from jolting, but I think that we can obviate that if we cut two strong poles about fifteen feet long, attach them to the pack-saddles of two horses, and by securely fastening a blanket between them make a hammock, in which he can ride comfortably. The poles would be elastic enough to save sudden jolts; we can only go at a foot's pace in these passes, and these native horses are so sure-footed that I think the chance of any accident is extremely slight. The horses are but lightly weighted, and as the provisions are consumed we can move a portion of the weight they carry to the one who takes our food."

"Yes, that would be a good plan, master."

"Another advantage of it would be," Angus went on, "that whereas he would chafe at being in a hospital in care of the people he hates, his spirits would naturally rise as he felt that he was returning to his friends, and this would hasten his recovery. However, I will put the question to him in the morning. If he decides upon being kept in camp,

I will send you back with a letter to Sir Alexander Burnes for stretcher-bearers, and you will easily overtake us at our camping-place to-morrow evening."

In the morning the young chief was better than Angus had even hoped for. Once or twice during the night fresh water had been poured gently over the bandages on the wounded shoulder. Like all people living chiefly in the open air, accustomed to climbing, and to hard exercise, the Afghans suffer less from wounds than Europeans do. Abstemious in their habits, comparatively small meat-eaters, lithe and sinewy in their figures, they speedily recover from wounds unless of a mortal nature. Angus found that the chief's forehead and hands were cool, and there were no signs of fever setting in.

"I have been thinking over what would be best for you, and decided to leave the choice to yourself. I am acquainted with Burnes Sahib, and if I send my servant with a letter I know that he will at once send out a party to carry you into hospital, where you will be well cared for."

"I would rather die than accept kindness at their hands," the Afghan said firmly.

"In that case there seems no other course but for me to construct a litter between two of my pack-horses, and to carry you over the mountains to Kundur."

"And would you thus burden yourself with a stranger?" the Afghan asked in a tone of great surprise.

"Certainly I would for a wounded stranger," Angus said; "but I do not think that there will be any great trouble, and I will try to make the journey as easy for you as possible." He then explained how he intended to carry him. The face of the wounded man lit up. He had permitted Angus to set his limb because he believed it was destiny that had sent him to his aid. He felt sure that the man who had taken such trouble with him would leave a store of

provisions within his reach, and that possibly some of the natives might come along and carry him to their village, and so tend him until his strength was restored. It was but a faint hope, for now that winter was approaching the men from the upper villages would have come down into the plain, and the chances were but slight that any would enter the gorge. His hope rested chiefly in the belief that, as he had been so unexpectedly saved from death, his final deliverance would also be effected; but that this kind trader should offer to carry him up the passes had never entered his mind, and his pale cheek flushed with pleasure.

"Certainly I will go with you if you will take me," he said joyfully; "nobly indeed do you carry out the precept of the Prophet, to be compassionate to all those who need it."

"Let us say no more about it, chief. It will be a pleasure to me to see you grow stronger, and I doubt not that the mountain air will benefit you greatly, and I shall have my reward in seeing you regaining your strength. We have meat with us, but it will be better for you to take fruit and a little bread."

Two soldiers were sent out, and presently returned with poles of the desired length and thickness. Breakfast was then eaten. Afterwards the poles, a long blanket having been firmly lashed between them, were securely fastened against the horses' flanks under their burdens. In this way a hammock was formed in which, while the body and legs were below the level of the poles, the head was somewhat above them. A cloak was rolled up to make a pillow, and the chief was then gently lifted and laid in it.

They started at daybreak, rested in the shade for three or four hours in the middle of the day, and then continued their journey till late in the evening. After two days' travel the halt was no longer necessary, for they were now far

above the level of the plain. The air was fresh during the day, and at night all were glad to cover themselves with their long coats lined with sheep-skin.

Angus had made no attempt to discover the position of the ball in the shoulder of the wounded chief. Even if he found it, he had neither the instruments nor the skill necessary for its removal. The only thing he could do was to keep the cloths bathed with cold water to prevent inflammation setting in.

The track they were following sometimes disappeared altogether, and Angus often congratulated himself upon having the young chief with him, for the latter had twice before crossed the mountains, and was able to tell him which line to take. The day's journey varied much in length, being from fifteen to twenty-five miles, according as they found a suitable halting-place. They always camped where there was water, emptying the skins and filling them afresh as often as possible. At times the ground was covered with snow. This they thawed in a pot over a fire of brushwood, of which they were careful to gather some at every opportunity on the day's march.

The chief and Angus occupied the little tent, while Azim slept with the two soldiers in a shelter composed of blankets. Every day there was a visible improvement in the state of the wounded man; the cool air acted as a tonic to his system. The first two or three days his arm pained him a good deal, though he had never once complained of it. It was kept bound to his side, and by means of splints and bandages the shoulder was held in its natural position; more than this Angus had not attempted. He believed that the shoulder was broken, but even of this he was not sure, and could only hope that the bone would knit together itself. One day, however, in reply to his questions the Afghan admitted that he felt a burning pain just over the left shoulder,

and feeling, Angus perceived a hard substance apparently but a short distance under the skin.

"There is no doubt that this is the ball," he said. "A surgeon would cut down upon it, and get it out easily enough."

"Then why do you not do it? you seem very skilful."

"I have had no practice," he said. "My father was a trader of Tabriz. He was a good man and very much respected. The poor often came to him in cases of accidents, and I have many a time seen him bandage broken limbs, that is why I was able to do it; but of bullet wounds I know nothing."

"Take my dagger and cut down to it at once; the pain of a cut is nothing. Cut fearlessly and deeply, so that you can take hold of the ball with your fingers."

After some hesitation Angus agreed to do so, for, by the pain it was causing, the bullet might set up inflammation.

"It is a mere nothing," the Afghan said. "I have frequently cut out bullets from my tribesmen."

The chief's dagger was as keen as a razor, and seeing that his patient really wished it, Angus performed the operation. He had to cut three times before he could manage to get hold of the bullet. The Afghan himself did not once flinch.

"That is well," he said, when the ball was extracted. "Now, bring the edges together again, put a piece of wet rag over them, and then tie a bandage tightly round me; by the end of a week there will be nothing but a scar remaining."

Two days later they arrived at Bamian. As they entered the little town a native officer of a Ghoorka regiment came out and demanded their business. For the first time Angus was unable to give an answer in the language in which he was addressed. Knowing, however, the purport of the

question, he showed his letter to Lieutenant Mackenzie. The native was unable to read English, but called to an English artilleryman, who at once came up. On seeing the letter he motioned to the pretended trader to follow him, and conducted him to the house where Lieutenant Mackenzie lodged.

"There is a man outside who has a letter for you, sir," he said saluting.

"An Englishman?'

"No, sir, one of these traders, I think. He has some horses with packs, and he has a wounded or dead man in a litter."

"Show him in."

Angus on entering said in Persian, "My orders are to deliver this letter to you when alone, sir."

The lieutenant signed to two orderlies, to whom he had at the time been giving orders, and Angus then went on in English: "You do not remember me, Lieutenant Mackenzie. I am Angus Campbell, on the staff of Sir Alexander Burnes."

"Oh, yes, I remember you now," the officer said, rising and shaking him by the hand. "Of course we have met many times, but in that Persian dress I did not know you again. I suppose you have come to see how we are getting on?"

"No. I am on a mission across the mountains to see what Dost Mahomed is really doing there, as you will see by this letter."

The officer glanced through it. "I see you do not want the natives here—there are not many of them—to be asking any questions. Let me see. We are pretty closely packed, as you may imagine. I could give you a room here, but that would hardly do."

"No, it would not do at all," Angus said. "It would appear strange indeed to the natives if you were to so

honour a travelling merchant. I can do very well without a room, for I have a tent that I have used on my journey. All I wish is that you give an order that we shall not be in any way interfered with."

"That I can do easily enough, and will put a sentry over your encampment with orders that no one is to enter into conversation with your followers."

"Thank you; that is just what I desire."

"I hear that one of your men is ill, can anything be done for him? We have a doctor with us, and you could leave the man in hospital, and he could either make his way back when cured, or follow you—though I doubt whether that would be possible, as the passes will soon be completely blocked with snow. As soon as we are sure of this we shall return to Cabul, so we are looking forward eagerly, as you may imagine, for the news that they have become impassable."

"Thank you. The man met with an accident by falling from his horse, but I doctored him as well as I could, and I think in another day or two he will be able to sit a horse; and as he knows the passes, I must keep him with me, for already the paths are in many cases obliterated by snow. and I should fare badly indeed without him."

"Yes, I see that. How long are you going to stay here?"

"I shall start again the day after to-morrow. It is most important that I should push on, for the passes may be closed any day. I will give the horses and men one day's rest, that is all that I can afford now. I will say good-bye, for it would not do for you to be seen speaking to me again."

"No, I suppose it would not do for you to come here, but I will after dark to-night come down and have a chat with you. I have had no news from Cabul for the last fortnight. There would be no harm in that, would there?"

"No; I should be very glad if you would come in that way."

Half an hour later the tents were erected, and two sentries were placed near them to warn off all intruders. Angus went into the little town, and made some purchases from three small traders who had remained there, and had been well rewarded for doing so by the prices they obtained from the troops for their stores. Lieutenant Mackenzie, on his arrival, had ordered them to send all the liquor they had to his quarters, telling them that unless they agreed to this they would not be allowed to remain, and promising that the liquor should be returned to them when the troops left. Their stores were almost exhausted, but Angus was able to purchase some rice, a pot of ghee, and a sack of grain for the horses. At eight o'clock Mackenzie came down. Sadut Khan had been apprised of the intended visit, and had willingly consented to be carried for the time into the other tent, so that Angus had his to himself.

"It is a snug little tent," Mackenzie said when he entered it; "not much head room, but that is of no consequence, as it is only a place for sleeping in. I am ashamed to come empty-handed, but I only brought a couple of bottles of spirits with me, and they are both empty long ago. I can't drink this beastly native stuff. And besides, the room in which I stored all there was in the place when I got here is locked up. I made the traders put their seals to it so that there could be no dispute about the quantities when I handed them over."

"Thank you," Angus said; "I don't touch spirits. Whatever may be the case in other places, I am convinced that men are better off without them in a country like this. Certainly they are best avoided in hot weather; and I think even in the cold weather coffee is infinitely better, and I have brought a good store of that with me. Now, make

yourself as comfortable as you can. Fill your pipe from that jar, it is the best Persian tobacco. Then when the coffee comes in I will give you the news from Cabul."

A large jug of coffee, with two silver horns which Angus had bought before starting, was soon brought in, and then Angus told what had happened at Cabul since the last letter Mackenzie had received.

"Then you don't think things are going on well?" Mackenzie said when he had concluded.

"No, there is much disaffection among the lower class in the city. The tribesmen are restless and discontented. It was a great mistake to allow Shah Soojah the entire control of all civilian matters; the consequence is that the people are grievously oppressed by the tax-gatherers. The Ameer himself is impatient at the slightest attempt to control him. He renders himself intensely unpopular by hardly ever appearing in public, by his refusal to grant audiences, and by his haughtiness and arrogance to those whom he does admit to his presence. I am certain that he could not maintain himself for a day if we were to march away, and I don't see how we can leave him to his fate. Altogether the situation is very difficult, and I am afraid it will end badly. They want a strong man at the head of affairs. I do not think that Macnaghten is a strong man. Keane is a good soldier, but it is said that he will return to England in the spring."

"And how about Burnes?"

"Burnes is my chief," Angus said with a smile; "but I can say this, I believe that if he were in Macnaghten's place things would go on better. At present, however, he has no authority of any kind. He differs from Macnaghten on almost every point, and any advice he gives is almost contemptuously neglected."

"It is a queer state of affairs," Mackenzie said. "How-

ever, I suppose we shall get out all right in the end. It is a way we have. We generally make a muddle in the beginning, but our fighting power has pulled us through. Well, I will be going now; it is eleven o'clock. I think that it would be better that I should not come again to-morrow."

"I think so too. If the Afghans here entertained the smallest suspicion that you were visiting me, they would feel sure that I was not the trader I pretended to be, and would find means of sending a message across the mountains, which would result in the failure of my mission and my own certain death."

After a hearty farewell, and an expression of the best wishes for the success of his mission, Mackenzie said goodbye and left the tent. The Afghan chief was carried back into it, and in a few minutes all in the little camp were asleep.

CHAPTER XI

A DANGEROUS JOURNEY

ANGUS made every effort to secure the services of a native well acquainted with the passes as guide, but was altogether unsuccessful. The difficulties were, they declared, insurmountable, the danger overwhelming.

"I must see what I can do," Sadut Khan said, when Angus informed him that the natives were all of opinion that the snow was too heavy and the danger too great for the pass to be attempted. "We stayed here for some days, when I crossed the hills with Dost Mahomed. There is a petty chief living in a village two miles away; if he is still there,

I think he would accompany you. Whether or not, I am certain he would not divulge the secret of my being here to anyone."

"I will go myself to see him," Angus said. "I hope indeed he will accompany us, for if not, I fear that our journey has come to an end, as the offers I have made would have tempted any of the natives here to go with me if they had thought it possible. Shall I mention your name to him?"

"Say to him only that a chief of the Momunds, whom he knew here three months ago, desires to speak to him."

Angus at once mounted his horse and rode to the foot of the hill upon which the village with the tower of its chief was perched. Then fastening the bridle to a stunted shrub, he made his way up the steep ascent on foot. The place did not contain more than a dozen houses. As he passed through these, natives wrapped in sheep-skin jackets came to the door and gazed at him with angry scowls. As he reached the door of the tower four armed men came out.

"What would you here, stranger?" one of them said.

"I would speak a few words with your chief."

"He does not want either to buy or to sell," the man said shortly.

"I do not seek to sell," Angus said. "I have a message of importance to him."

One of them went into the tower, and returning in a minute, motioned to Angus to follow him. The chief, a tall and powerful man of middle age, was seated on the floor of a room in the upper story of the tower. Near him was a large earthenware pan, in which a charcoal fire was burning.

"Why come you here, Persian?" he said, "and what message can one like you bear to me?"

Angus repeated the message that Sadut Khan had given him. The chief rose to his feet suddenly. "You lie!" he

said fiercely, "he is dead. The news came to us a week since."

"Nevertheless, he gave me that message; and if you will come with me to Bamian you will see for yourself that he is not dead, though it is true that he has been sorely hurt."

"I go not into Bamian," the chief said. "I have not put foot in the town since the accursed infidels came there. They have held no communication with me, nor I with them. This may be a trick to lure me there and make me prisoner."

"If they had desired to do so," Angus said quietly, "they would have sent a hundred men with a gun or two, and not a mere trader. Besides, how could they have told that a Momund chief had been here with Dost Mahomed when he passed through?"

"Many could have told you that," the chief said, "seeing that, next to the Ameer himself, he was the most observed of the party."

"Well, chief, if you will not go, I have nothing to do but to return and inform him that you refuse to come and see him."

"How can he be there, in the midst of the enemy, unless indeed he is a prisoner?"

"He is not a prisoner; he lies in my tent. You can see him without entering Bamian, for my camp is outside the town. What motive, chief, could I have in deceiving you?"

"I will go," the chief said suddenly. "It shall not be said that I refused to answer such a call, however improbable it might seem."

He threw on a cloak lined with sheep-skins, and telling his men that unless something befell him he would be back by noon, he led the way down the hill. Angus mounted his horse when he reached it and rode beside him. For some distance the Afghan did not speak.

"Do you know the name of this chief?" he asked abruptly when half the distance had been traversed.

"It is Sadut Khan, the fighting chief of the Momunds, and a nephew by marriage of the Ameer."

The Afghan had not expected this reply.

"You must be in his confidence indeed, Persian, or he would not thus have disclosed himself when in the midst of those who would hail his capture as one of the most valuable prizes."

"He has, as you say, faith in me," Angus said quietly, "and will, doubtless, when you see him, give you his reason for that trust in me."

"Your story must be true, and I believe it; forgive me for at first doubting it. But having heard that the chief had been killed, I thought this was a plot of some kind."

"It was natural that you should not believe me," Angus said. "You could scarce credit that he was alive, and, what was still more strange, that he should be in a town occupied by the English, and yet not be a prisoner."

"This is a fortunate day for me, indeed," the Afghan said. "There is no chief whose name is more honoured in the country than that of Sadut Khan. He is as brave as a lion, good to his people, and faithful to Dost Mahomed, when so many have fallen away from him. The Ameer regards him as if he were a favourite son, and it will gladden his heart indeed, and lessen his troubles, when he learns that he is still alive."

Avoiding the town they went straight to Sadut. Angus dismounted and led the way to his little white tent, and, raising the flap, said to the chief, "He is here; enter."

The Afghan did so; and thinking it best to leave them together for a time, Angus strolled away and saw that his horse was, as usual, well wrapped up in a thick felt blanket.

It was half an hour before the chief made his appearance at the entrance to the tent and looked round.

Angus at once spoke to him.

"My friend," said the chief, "I again ask your pardon for doubting you for a moment. Allah will surely bless you for the good work you have done. Sadut Khan has told me all, and it passes my understanding why a stranger should have cumbered himself with a wounded man of whom he knew nothing."

"Does not the Koran bid us succour the afflicted?"

"That is true, my friend, but there are surely limits. One will do great things for a friend, one may do something for a stranger, but to hinder one's journey and cumber one's self with a wounded stranger is surely more than can be expected of us."

Angus now entered the tent.

"My trust in the chief was not misplaced," Sadut Khan said. "He will act as our guide across the mountains, though he doubts whether it will be possible to cross the passes. If it is the will of Allah, Persian, that we should not, we can but die."

"That is so," Angus said; "but the passes may not be as badly blocked as we expect."

"We can hardly hope that," the chief replied, shaking his head. "The last party that came over reported that they had never known it so bad. This was a week ago, and since then the sky has always been dull to the north, and it has surely been snowing there. However, to-day it is lighter, and maybe no more snow will fall for a time. We had best lose not an hour in starting. I shall take four of my men with me. We have no horses, but that matters not at all, for the passage will have to be made on foot. Let us move to-morrow at daybreak, and travel as far as we can before it is dark."

When the arrangements were all settled, Angus went into the village and bought some more grain, cheese, and other food, also a store of extra blankets, and two other native tents; these were to be packed on his horse and Azim's. Among other things he bought two native lamps for each tent, and a good supply of oil, a roll of flannel for tearing into strips for winding round the feet and legs, and he was then satisfied that he had done all in his power to render the enterprise a success. Before daybreak next morning Hassan, the Afghan chief, arrived with four of his followers, all strong and sinewy men. The animals were speedily packed; Sadut's litter was placed between two of the horses which were more lightly loaded than the others, and they set out just as daylight was spreading over the sky.

The speed with which the start was effected was in itself a sign that all felt the gravity of the task before them. Angus had the evening before explained to the two soldiers that the journey before them was one of tremendous difficulty, and offered to leave them in charge of Lieutenant Mackenzie till spring, when they could return to Cabul and rejoin their regiment; but they would not hear of it.

"We are both mountain men," one said, "and if others can get through we can. At any rate, we will risk anything rather than return with blackened faces and say that we had feared to follow our officer."

The morning was bitterly cold, but the sky was clear.

"We shall do well to-day," Hassan said to Angus, "and the horses are fresh. As for to-morrow, who can say?"

The snow was knee-deep when they got beyond the village. The ascent began almost at once and was heavy work both for men and horses.

They continued their journey till it was too dark to go farther, then they halted in a ravine which afforded some shelter from the piercing wind. All set to work to clear

away the snow where the tents were to be pitched, but before raising these the horses were attended to. Blankets were girded round them from the ears to the tail, and they were picketed touching each other for mutual warmth. A supply of corn was then laid down before each on some square pieces of felt placed on the snow. When the tents were pitched the lamps were lighted and the flaps closed, then snow was scraped up outside until the canvas was covered nearly to the top. In spite of the intense cold all were thoroughly warmed by their hard work before they turned in. Angus took Azim into his tent, the rest divided themselves among the other two. At other times it would have been unpleasant to be so closely packed, but in such weather it was an advantage.

Before setting to work to pile the snow against the tents a brass kettle filled with water had been suspended from the ridge-pole over the lamps, and the water was almost boiling by the time the work was finished, and in a few minutes coffee was made. The frozen carcasses of four sheep had been brought, as well as a large quantity of meat that had been cooked on the previous day. Some slices of the latter were thawed over the lamp and eaten with bread that had been purchased at Bamian. But few words were spoken after the meal was finished, their fatigue and the warmth of the tent rendering it difficult for them to keep awake. In a few minutes all were sound asleep. The next day's march was even more arduous. Sadut had given up his litter and again mounted his horse, as it was found impossible for the two animals linked together by the hammock to make their way up the steep place. The work was toilsome in the extreme, but all worked cheerfully.

Hassan and his four men laboured with the greatest vigour, carrying burdens to places which horses when laden could not have climbed, hauling the animals out of deep drifts

into which they frequently fell, carrying Sadut Khan in his litter at points where the ascent was so steep that, crippled as he still was by his injured leg, he could not have retained his seat in the saddle. The party worked in almost complete silence, but with a stern determination and energy which showed their consciousness that every moment was of importance. Twelve miles were the result of as many hours of labour. No signs of a track had been visible since they left Bamian, and Angus felt how absolutely impossible it would have been to cross the pass had it not been for the intimate knowledge of Hassan and his followers; even these were sometimes at fault. None of them had ever passed over the mountains when so deeply covered with snow, and consultations constantly took place between them as to the line to be followed. When they arrived at their halting-place for the night, Hassan told Angus and the Momund chief that they were now within two hundred feet of the top of the pass.

"To-morrow's work will be the most dangerous; the north wind sweeps across the plateau with terrible force. Moreover, I do not like the look of the sky this evening. We have been fortunate so far, but I think that there will be a change."

"It is well, indeed," Sadut said as they ate their supper, "that we crossed the highest pass before the snow began in earnest; we certainly could not have supported that journey had we been ten days later. We have got through the hardest part of the work, and everything now depends upon the weather. May Allah grant that there be no more snow. The pass to-morrow is but twelve miles across, and if all goes well we shall begin to descend on the following morning. If the snow holds off we shall be able to do that distance easily, for it is almost a level plain that we have to traverse. Parts of it will be nearly clear of snow, which

the fierce blasts sweep away as fast as it falls, while in other places the surface will be hard enough to walk on, the snow being pressed firmly together by the weight of the wind."

They were on foot again next morning even earlier than usual. All were aware of the importance of haste. The tents were pulled down and loaded with the greatest rapidity. The cold was intense, and but few words were spoken until they reached the summit of the ascent, by which time the effort of climbing had restored the heat that had been lost as soon as they left their warm tents. The sky was cloudless, and Angus felt hopeful that the day's journey would be accomplished with comparative ease. He noticed, however, that there was an anxious look on the faces of the five tribesmen, who, although they were travelling more rapidly than they had done since they left Bamian, were constantly urging horses and men to press forward at a greater speed. Angus had expected that they would have to face very strong wind, but scarce a breath was blowing.

As Sadut had predicted, the rock was in many places completely bare. The fields of snow were so hard that, instead of struggling knee-deep as before, they now seldom sank over their feet, and sometimes left scarcely a track upon the surface. The hills on either side stood up clear and hard, and the silence was almost oppressive. They were, they calculated, half-way across the pass three hours after leaving their camp, when Hassan, who was walking beside Angus and Sadut, stopped suddenly and pointed to the sky. Looking up Angus saw two or three little wisps of vapour passing overhead with extraordinary speed.

"The storm!" Hassan exclaimed. "See, others are coming; it will soon be upon us. We can go no farther, but must prepare to meet it instantly or we shall be overwhelmed."

Knowing that Hassan would not have spoken thus unless from the direst necessity, Angus at once ordered a halt. The plateau was perfectly flat, and nowhere could any shelter be obtained, and they were now on an expanse of hard snow. Urged by the shouts and exclamations of Hassan all hastened to unload the animals. As soon as this was done, Angus ordered the tents to be pitched.

"It is useless," Hassan said, "they would be blown down in an instant. Let them lie open on the snow. Let each man take his two blankets and keep them by him in readiness, and when the storm begins let him wrap himself up in these, and then let those who are tent-fellows lie down together on one side of the tent, pull the other over them, and roll themselves in it. I and my men will be the last to take shelter, and we will pile the sacks and saddles over the ends to keep them down. But first put all the extra blankets over the horses and fasten them over their heads, and let them hang down well behind. They will turn their backs to the wind. Make all those that are accustomed to lie down do so. Range the others close to them."

Ten minutes of hard work and all was ready. Then they had time to look round. The sky was hidden from view by masses of black clouds streaming along. The men took their places on their tents and wrapped their blankets round in readiness.

"Lie down at once!" Hassan ordered. "It will be upon us almost immediately."

The men did so. Hassan and his followers pulled the felt covering over them, pushing the edge of the upper side under them as far as possible. Then they piled baggage and saddles on the ends. Angus, with Azim and Sadut, remained standing till the last. Hassan ran up to them with his men.

"Quick!" he said, "the storm will be upon us immediately."

Glancing ahead as he lay down, Angus saw what looked like a white mist in the distance, and knew that it must be snow swept up by the force of the wind. Half a minute and they were tucked up in the thick felt; this was weighted at both ends.

"Allah preserve you!" Hassan shouted, then all was silent. A minute later the storm struck them with such force that they felt as if pressed down by a heavy weight. Had they been inclined to speak they could not have heard each other, so loud was the howl of the wind. Wrapped up in their sheep-skin posteens and blankets, they did not feel the cold. For some time Angus lay and wondered how long this would last. Presently he fell asleep, the warmth, after the bitterly cold air outside, overpowering even the thought of danger. He was lying between Sadut and Azim, who, like himself, lay without moving. Indeed, movement would have been difficult, so tightly was the tent wrapped round them. He slept for many hours vaguely conscious of the roar and fury of the gale. When he awoke at last it was with a sense of suffocation, a heavy weight seemed to press upon him, and the sound of the storm had ceased.

"Are you awake?" he asked the others, but he had to shake them before he obtained an answer.

"Something must be done," he went on, as soon as they were capable of understanding him. "We shall be suffocated if we don't let some air in."

"That is true," Sadut said. "The snow is evidently piled up round us. We must let air in, or we shall perish."

But in spite of their efforts they found it impossible to move forward to get to the end of the roll.

"We must cut our way out; it is our only chance," Angus said, and turning on to his back, he managed to get out his long Afghan knife, and cut a slit three feet long in

the felt. As he did so, the snow came pouring in through the opening.

"Do you both put your hands under my shoulders," he said, "and help me to sit up."

It was not until he had cut a transverse slit so as to allow the hole to open wider that he was able to do so.

"The snow is not packed very hard," he said, as he pressed it aside. "It can't be very deep, for I can see light."

It was not long before he was on his feet, and had pushed the snow sufficiently back to enable his companions to get out also. The feeling of suffocation was already relieved, as a sufficient amount of air made its way through the snow, and after five minutes' hard work they clambered out. The gale was still blowing, though not so violently as at first, the snow still falling thickly. Two white mounds marked the position of the other tents, elsewhere a wide expanse of level snow was seen. It was evident that, as it drifted, it had first heaped itself against the tent. More had settled beyond it, and so gradually mounds had risen until they were seven or eight feet high.

"We must rescue the others at once," Angus said.

On the windward side the snow was so hard that their hands made no impression upon it, but on the sheltered side it was lighter, and working with their hands they were soon able to clear it away down to the end of the tent beneath which Hassan and three of his followers were lying. It was not, like the others, closed there, as its occupants had been unable to place weights on it after they had rolled themselves up. As soon as they had cleared the snow and opened the felt out a little, Sadut called—

"Are you awake, Hassan?"

"I am awake," he replied, "but am bound down hand and foot."

They cleared the snow off until they saw a foot. Taking

hold of this together they pulled and gradually drew one of the men out. The other three were extricated more easily. They found that these had not suffered so much from a sense of suffocation as the first party had done, as, the ends of the roll being open, a certain amount of air had found its way through the snow. Half an hour's hard work sufficed to rescue the occupants of the other tent. The three were unconscious, but the cold blast speedily brought them round.

"What is to be done next?" Angus asked Hassan.

"The gale is still far too severe for us to move," the latter answered. "We had best clear away the snow over the tents, and then take to them again."

After two hours' work the tents were cleared. The men had worked from above, throwing out the snow over the sides of the mound, so that when they had finished the tents lay at the bottoms of sloping holes. A meal was then eaten, and lifting the upper covering of felt they lay down again and closed it over them. The sun was in the east, and they knew that some fifteen hours had elapsed since the gale had struck them. A mound of snow had marked where the horses were lying. They did not interfere with these, for Hassan said that the horses, would be able to breathe through the snow, and probably the heat of their bodies had melted it immediately round them, and they would be much warmer than if the snow were cleared off. Before turning in Hassan and his men managed to erect the tent of their leaders. Lying as it did in a crater of snow, it was sheltered from the force of the wind. Holes were made with a dagger on each side of the slit that Angus had cut, and the edges tied together by a strip of leather. A couple of lamps and oil were taken from the sack in which they were carried, and also the bag of corn, and the little party after filling their vessels with snow and hang-

ing them over the lamps, and closing the entrance to the tent, soon felt comfortable again.

"It has been a narrow escape," Sadut said. "Had it not been for your thinking of cutting the tent, and so enabling us to make our way out, the whole caravan would assuredly have perished. Now, we have only an imprisonment for another day or two at most, and can then proceed on our journey."

The next morning the gale had ceased, though the snow continued to fall. By mid-day the sky cleared, and all issuing out from their shelters prepared for a start. It took them an hour's work to extricate the horses; one of these, a weakly animal, had died, the others appeared uninjured by their imprisonment. All the vessels in the camp had been used for melting snow, and a drink of warm water with some flour stirred into it was given to each of the animals, and an extra feed of corn. As soon as they had eaten this, the baggage was packed on their backs, and the party moved forward. It was heavy work. The snow that had fallen since the force of the wind had abated was soft, and the animals sank fetlock-deep in it. But after three hours' travelling, they reached the end of the pass and began to descend. Two hours later they halted at a spot where a wall of rock afforded shelter against the wind from the north.

"Allah be praised that we have reached this point!" Hassan said. "Now the worst is over. I can see that we shall have another storm before an hour is past, they generally follow each other when they once begin. But here we are safe, and it was for this that I said 'No' when you proposed that we should halt at the mouth of the pass."

The tents were soon erected, great stones being placed on the lower edge to steady them against the gusts of wind. Then a diligent search was made for wood, and enough bushes were found to make a good fire. Strips of meat

from one of the frozen sheep were cooked, the kettles were boiled, cakes of flour and ghee were baked, and the travellers made a hearty meal. The horses were each given half a bucket of warm water, thickened with flour, and a double feed of grain. Then all sat round the fire smoking and talking until it burned low, when, in spite of their sheepskin coats, the bitter cold soon made itself felt. They had scarcely turned into their tents when the storm, as Hassan had predicted, burst. Except for an occasional gust they felt it but little, and slept soundly until morning, when they found that light snow had eddied down, and was lying two feet deep. The day was spent in cooking and attending to their own wants and those of the horses.

For two days they were prisoners, then the gale abated, and they continued their journey, and late that evening arrived at the village of Chol. Here they were received with hospitality by the natives, who were astounded that in such weather the caravan should have made its way over the pass. Resting here for two days, they travelled to Kala Sarkari. Sadut now took the lead, for the chief of the village seeing three horses loaded with merchandise demanded toll; but, Sadut announcing himself as a nephew of Dost Mahomed, and saying that the whole party were under his protection, the threatening attitude that the inhabitants began to assume was at once calmed. Four days' travel, with halts at small villages, took them to Balkh. Here, on declaring himself, Sadut was received with great honour, and was entertained at the governor's house, where Dost Mahomed was lying ill. No attention was bestowed upon Hassan and his followers, who walked behind him, and were reported as having been the means of his safety. Angus with his party kept some little distance in the rear and took up their quarters at a khan unnoticed, but when Sadut was seen to call early the next morning upon the Persian trader

and remain with him for a considerable time, it was understood that they were under his protection, and no enquiries were made by the authorities of the town.

On the third day Sadut said to Angus: "I regret that the Ameer is ill. Had it not been for that he would have received you. I told him of the services you have rendered me, and that but for you a few hours would have ended my life. He said that he would like to see so noble a man, and to give him a fitting testimonial of gratitude for the service done to his sister's son. He requested me to bring you to him as soon as he is able to rise from his couch; and when he enters Cabul in triumph, as he assuredly will do ere long, he hopes that you will establish yourself there. I can promise you that your business shall flourish."

"I thank you heartily, Khan, for having spoken to the Ameer about me," Angus said gravely, "but I cannot receive a present from Dost Mahomed. I have intended many times to tell you more about myself, and I feel that I must do so now. You are my friend, and I cannot remain in a false position with you. As long as we were travelling together, no harm was done; it mattered not to you who was the man who had aided you in your extremity. But the case is different now. You were then a sorely wounded man, who needed what aid I could give you; now you are a close relation of Dost Mahomed, and a powerful Afghan chief, so the case is changed. Dost Mahomed, and no doubt yourself, know what is passing in Cabul by means of your friends there, who see all that is going on. The English general, on the other hand, knows nothing of what is passing beyond the ground patrolled by his cavalry.

"It was important for him to learn what was passing on this side of the mountains, and he selected me, an officer in his army, on account of my knowledge of Persian and Pushtoo, to cross the mountains and ascertain what prospect

there was of Dost Mahomed's returning with an army to Cabul in the spring. I confide my secret to you as to a friend. You can see that it would be impossible for me to accept presents from Dost Mahomed in my character of a Persian merchant, and for the same reason I should abstain from questioning you, or even allowing you to give me any information as to the military preparations going on. To do so would be to take an unfair advantage of the chances that enabled me to be of service."

Angus had thought the matter over, and knew that while such work as he was engaged in would, if discovered, cost him his life, it would be regarded by the Afghans as a legitimate means of obtaining information; and although if caught he would be killed as an enemy, his action would be regarded as showing that he was a man of great bravery thus to place himself in the power of an enemy. This was the view, indeed, in which Sadut Khan regarded it.

"You have done well to tell me," he said gravely. "It was truly the act of a brave man not only to risk discovery here, but to undertake the terrible adventure of crossing the passes when winter had fairly set in, in order to obtain information for your general. Still more do I wonder that you should have burdened yourself with the care of an enemy, one who was fighting against your people. It was wonderful on the part of a Persian trader, it is far more so on the part of one against whom I was fighting, who is not of my religion, who was engaged upon an enterprise of such a nature, and to whom speed was a matter of the greatest importance. Had it not been for the slow pace at which you travelled with me, you might have crossed all the passes before they were blocked. I shall fight against your people as before, but I shall respect them now I see that although our religions differ, there are good things in their beliefs as in ours, and that even the

Koran has no lessons in charity and kindliness stronger than those that you have learned from the teaching of your own religion.

"What I thought wonderful on the part of a Persian merchant is still more marvellous on the part of an English officer, who could have no possible interest in saving a dying man; and who, indeed, might have gained credit by delivering him into the hands of his countrymen, since so long as I was a prisoner in their hands, I should be a hostage for the quiet behaviour of my people. You can do no harm to us by your enquiries here; it is known by all on this side of the mountains that the Ameer will in the spring endeavour to turn out the usurper; it is known already to every sheik from Candahar to Jellalabad. Whether he will come with ten thousand or twenty thousand men matters little; when he appears, all Afghanistan will rise. Your generals might have been sure that it would be so without sending to make enquiries. I cannot tell you with what force we shall come. It will not be a great army; even in summer a large force could scarcely traverse the passes. It is not on the force that he will take from here that Dost Mahomed relies; it is on the host he will gather round him when he crosses the mountains. We have learned that the disaffection to Soojah is everywhere on the increase. There were many who did not love the Barukzyes, but they know now that things are worse instead of better since the change, for the man has made himself hated by his arrogance, his contempt for the people in general, and the extortion exercised by his tax-gatherers.

"There is no secret in all this, your own officers must know it. What you will not learn, for the decision will not be made until the spring, is the line by which the Ameer will advance. There are many passes by which he may then cross; or he may go round by Herat, and gather

forces as he advances. Or again, he might go east, and crossing by the passes there, come down through Chitral to Jellalabad."

"That I can well understand, Khan. Of course I have already learned that there is no doubt that Dost Mahomed is preparing to cross the passes in the spring, and that he is sure of the support of the tribesmen on this side of the mountains."

"He could gather a very large army if he chose," Sadut said, "but the difficulty of transporting food for so large a body would be very great, I think that ten thousand men will be the utmost he could move with. I am doing no harm in telling you this, because you would soon learn it in the town, and it is certain that your people could not prevent his passing the Hindoo Koosh, since he has so many routes to choose from. His force is not like your army, which, moving with great trains of baggage, cannon, and ammunition, could only cross by one or two passes; we can move wherever our horses can climb. And now I will leave you, for I have some business to attend to; but I will return this evening."

CHAPTER XII

TROUBLES THICKEN

ANGUS saw that as he could not hope to obtain further information, however long he might stay, and as he had fulfilled the main object of his mission by discovering that Dost Mahomed would not be content with remaining master of the northern province, but would certainly advance in the spring, he could do no good by remaining any longer.

The information that he could give would enable Macnaghten and Burnes to show the Indian government that their intention of withdrawing more troops in the early spring would be disastrous; and it was with this special object in view that he had been sent. He had on the two previous days sold a portion of his goods, but had held out for the prices with which they were marked. He was now more willing to bargain, as he wished to travel in future as lightly as possible. Accordingly, before nightfall he had disposed of nearly half the stock with which he had started; but he had at the same time purchased a certain amount of goods from Turkestan, as these would be more appropriate as merchandise when he started from Balkh for Herat. Sadut came again in the evening.

"My friend," he said, "I have been thinking over your position. Doubtless you might stay here for some time without its being suspected that you were other than you seemed to be, but a chance word from one of your men might betray you, and as you have really learned all that there is to learn, it seems to me that there is no use in your tarrying any longer here. It is true that Dost Mahomed, for my sake, would protect you, even were you discovered. Still, you know the nature of our people, and were it rumoured that you were an infidel, you might be torn to pieces before either the Ameer or myself knew aught about it."

"I have come to the same conclusion. If I thought I could gain anything by remaining I should do so, whatever the risk; but as it would be useless to stay, I intend to leave to-morrow. I have a long journey to make via Herat; the sooner I am off the better. My men are now packing up my goods and preparing for a start at daylight."

"I felt so sure that this would be your course that I have brought with me an order from the Ameer to the governor and headmen of all towns and villages through which you

may pass, enjoining them to give you good treatment, as he holds you in high esteem for having rendered most valuable services to me."

"I thank you very heartily," Angus replied. "This will greatly facilitate my journey and save me from all small annoyances. I trust that we shall meet again."

"I hope so indeed. Never shall I forget the debt of gratitude that I owe you. Perhaps some day I may be able to repay that debt to a small extent. Remember, that in case of need you may rely upon me to the utmost. At any rate, you must not refuse to accept this; it is a present from Dost Mahomed, not to an English officer, but to a Persian merchant who has saved the life of his sister's son. He talks continually while with me of the nobility of your action, and when I told him that you were going he had his turban brought and took out this gem, which was its chief ornament, and bade me hand it you in remembrance of the deed. I told him you had said that you would receive no present for a simple act of humanity. More I could not tell him without revealing your secret, though I know that it would be safe with him. You cannot refuse to take this. As for myself, I am here an exile far away from my own people, and have but this to give you as a token of my love. It is my signet ring. If you send it to me I will go through fire and water to come to you. My tribesmen will all recognize it, and will do anything in their power for its possessor."

Angus saw that, offered as it was, he should greatly hurt the Afghan's feelings if he refused the immense ruby surrounded by diamonds that Dost Mahomed had sent him.

"I will not refuse the gift of the Ameer so given to me, and shall cherish it as my most valued possession and the gift of a man whom I for one, and I may say most British officers, consider to be very badly treated by us. I know from Sir Alexander Burnes that Dost Mahomed was most

anxious for our alliance. Shah Soojah is as unpopular among us as among his own people. Of course, as soldiers, it is not our business to concern ourselves with politics; that is a matter for the government only. Still we cannot but have our feelings, and I am sure that should the fortune of war ever place Dost Mahomed in our hands he would receive honourable treatment. Your gift I shall prize as highly, as a token of our warm friendship, and trust that the time may never come when I have to put its virtue to the test, though I well know that I could in necessity rely upon any help that you might be able to give me."

After talking for some time of the best route to follow, Sadut Khan took an affectionate leave, and Angus started the next morning with his party. Before setting out he bestowed handsome gifts upon Hassan and his followers, whom he had learned to like greatly for the devotion they had shown to Sadut and the energy and courage with which they had worked during the journey. Travelling from twenty to five-and-twenty miles a day, with occasional halts, he reached Cabul after two months of travel. His journey had been greatly facilitated by the order that he carried from Dost Mahomed. He had not entered Herat, as it was probable that he would be recognized there. Avoiding the city, he travelled by the same route as before to Girishk, and then took a road running a few miles north of Candahar and falling into the main road at Kelat-i-Ghilzye.

His first step was to see Sir Alexander Burnes and to report to him that assuredly Dost Mahomed would come south with a considerable force as soon as the passes were opened. His following would not itself be very formidable, but he relied upon being joined by all the tribesmen south of the hills.

"Your news is most opportune," the agent said, "and can hardly fail to induce the Governor-general to alter his deter-

mination to withdraw the greater part of our force in the spring. Already we have not a man too many for contingencies that may arise. Now, tell me about your journey. The winter set in so severely directly you left us that I have been seriously uneasy about you. I had only one message from Mackenzie after you had left, it was brought by a native; and he told me that you had passed through, but that the weather had changed for the worse the day after you started, and the universal opinion among the natives was that you and your party had perished."

Angus gave an account of his journey. He had thought over the question whether it would be wise to mention the episode of the wounded Afghan, but he concluded that it would be better to do so, as Mackenzie, when he rejoined the force, might casually mention that he had a sick man with him; and he therefore told the whole story as it happened.

"I admire your humanity, Mr. Campbell, though it seems almost quixotic to burden yourself with a wounded man. But, as you say, it was evident that if you could manage to carry him through he might be of great service to you. Undoubtedly he would have been a valuable prisoner to have in our hands, but his gratitude to you may prove valuable to us, for the Momunds are a powerful tribe, and your conduct to him cannot but have inspired him with a better feeling towards us than he has hitherto shown."

"He may have less animosity, sir, but I fear that he will still be found fighting against us. On the way he spoke many times of his determination to continue the struggle until Afghanistan was free from the infidel; I am convinced that his indignation at the treatment of Dost Mahomed, and his fanaticism are so strong that no private matter is likely to shake them."

The winter passed quietly, and the attention of Burnes

and Macnaghten was turned rather towards the frontier than to the state of things round Cabul. Yar Mahomed, virtual ruler of Herat, although he was receiving large sums of money from us, was known to be intriguing with Persia, and trying to form an alliance with the Shah to expel the British from Afghanistan. Russia had sent an expedition against Khiva, and the conquest of this little state would bring her more closely to the frontier of Afghanistan. Dost Mahomed, however, had gone on a visit to the Ameer of Bokhara, and had been detained for the present by that treacherous ruler; thus for a time the prospect of an invasion on his part was greatly diminished.

In the spring Macnaghten and Shah Soojah returned to Cabul. The former continued to ignore the warnings of Sir A. Burnes, as to the ever-growing hostility of the Afghans to the British and the man they had forced upon them. His advice and that of Burnes had been so far followed that the force at Cabul had not been diminished; but, not content with this, Macnaghten continued to urge on the Indian government the necessity of sending a great force to occupy Herat and another to cross the mountains and thwart the projects of the Russians by carrying our arms into Bokhara. Moreover, he was continually applying for money to meet the expenses of Shah Soojah's government. As if the drain that these demands would entail upon the Indian treasury and upon the Indian army were not sufficient, he insisted upon the necessity of conquering the Punjaub, where, since the death of Runjeet Sing, the attitude of the population had been increasingly hostile.

It is difficult to understand how any perfectly sane man could have made such propositions. It would have needed the whole army of India to carry them out, to say nothing of an enormous outlay of money. Although the Governor-general and his council firmly declined to enter upon the

wild schemes proposed to them, Macnaghten did not cease to send them lengthy communications urging the absolute necessity of his advice being followed.

As the summer came on there were everywhere signs of unrest. In April the Ghilzyes cut the communications near Candahar, but were defeated by a small body of troops sent from that city. The Beloochees, whose country had been annexed, were bitterly hostile, and convoys were cut off. Candahar was invested by them, Quettah besieged, and Khelat captured. With the exception of Macnaghten himself, there was scarcely an officer in the army but was conscious of the tempest that was gathering round them. Shah Soojah was as unpopular among them as among the native population. Macnaghten was almost as unpopular as the Shah. Everyone knew that it was his influence that had first induced Lord Auckland to enter upon this war, and the levity with which he replied to every warning, and the manner in which he deferred to Shah Soojah in every respect, and allowed him to drive the tribesmen to despair by the greed of the tax-gatherers, incensed the officers of the army to the utmost.

In the spring the little garrison of Bamian were on the point of being reinforced by a Sepoy battalion when Dr. Lord, who had been sent as political officer, received information that led him to believe that Jubbar Khan, one of Dost Mahomed's brothers, who was in charge of Dost's family at Khooloom, was ready to come in. One of his sons had already done so, and Lord thought that by sending forward a force to the fortress of Badjah he would quicken Jubbar Khan's movements. It had the desired effect, and Jubbar Khan came into Bamian bringing with him Dost Mahomed's family and a large party of retainers. This, however, in no way improved the position of the little party at Badjah, for the natives in the vicinity exhibited the greatest hostility. The

officer in command sent a detachment under Sergeant Douglas to escort another officer to Badjah. The party was, however, attacked, and although they made a gallant resistance, they would have been destroyed had not two companies of Ghoorkas arrived on the spot and beat off the enemy.

In August the startling news arrived that Dost Mahomed had escaped from Bokhara. He was received with open arms by the governor of Khooloom and a large force speedily gathered round him. Early in September he advanced upon Bamian with eight thousand men. Badjah was attacked, and although the Ghoorka regiment kept back the assailants, it was evident that so advanced a post could not be held, and the force retreated, leaving all their baggage behind them. A regiment of Afghan infantry had been raised and were stationed at Bamian, but on hearing of Dost Mahomed's approach they deserted to a man, most of them joining the enemy. Even Macnaghten could no longer shut his eyes to the serious nature of the position. Cabul was full of Sikh emissaries, who were stirring up the population to revolt, promising them that the Sikh nation would join in driving out the infidel. Reinforcements under Colonel Dennie reached Bamian on the 14th of September, and on the 17th Dost Mahomed with his army approached the place. Ignorant that the whole force was upon him, Dennie sent Mackenzie with two guns and four companies of native infantry and some four hundred Afghan horse, and himself followed with four more companies in support.

On joining the advanced party, he found that the whole of Dost Mahomed's force was in front of him. In spite of the enormous disparity of numbers, he determined to attack; a wise resolution, for although in our Indian wars the natives often fought bravely when they attacked us, they seldom offered a vigorous opposition when we took the offensive. Mackenzie's two guns opened fire with shrapnel, which had

a terrible effect upon the dense masses of the enemy. These were unable to withstand the fire, and soon began to fall back. Mackenzie followed them, and again opened fire. Before long, Dost Mahomed's levies broke and fled; and Dennie launched the Afghan horsemen in pursuit. These cut down great numbers of the enemy, and dispersed them in all directions. The effect of this signal defeat was at once apparent. The Governor of Khooloom entered into negotiations without delay, and pledged himself not to harbour or assist Dost Mahomed; the country south of Khooloom was divided, he taking half, while the southern portion came under the authority of Shah Soojah.

The victory caused great satisfaction in Cabul, but this feeling was short-lived. Dost Mahomed after his defeat went to Kohistan, where there was great discontent among the chiefs, some of whom were already in revolt. General Sale sent a force from Jellalabad, which attacked a fortified position held by them, but the assault was repulsed with heavy loss. It was about to be renewed, when the Kohistanees evacuated the fort and fled. The fact, however, that our troops had met with a repulse had a great effect upon the minds of the natives. For the first time the Afghans had successfully withstood an attack by British soldiers.

Throughout the month of October Dost Mahomed was busy, and at one time approached within forty miles of Cabul, when guns were hastily mounted on the citadel to overawe the town, and orders sent to the force at Bamian to return at once. Dost, however, moved no nearer. Sir Robert Sale was pursuing him, and it was not until the 27th that he moved down again towards Cabul, and on the 29th the greater part of the force there marched out to give him battle.

On the 2nd of November the two armies came face to face in the valley of Purwandurrah. The Ameer at once

moved from the village to the neighbouring heights, and the British cavalry galloped to outflank the Afghan horse. These were comparatively few in number, but headed by Dost Mahomed himself, they advanced steadily to meet the Indian cavalry. Gallantly as Indian troops have fought on numberless fields, on this occasion they disgraced themselves utterly. Turning rein as the Afghans approached, they galloped away in headlong flight, pursued by the Afghans until within range of the British guns. Their officers in vain attempted to arrest their flight, charging alone into the midst of the enemy. Two of them were killed when surrounded by enemies, Dr. Lord was shot, and the other two cut their way through their assailants and reached the British line covered with wounds. No more disgraceful affair has taken place in the story of our wars in India than this rout of Indian cavalry by a third of their number of wild horsemen.

But even yet the affair might have been retrieved had an officer like Dennie been in command; had the guns opened and the infantry advanced it might still have been a repetition of the victory of Bamian. But Sir A. Burnes was in authority, and, easily discouraged, as was his nature, he gave no orders, but sent off word to Macnaghten that there was nothing for it but to fall back to Cabul. Suddenly, however, the position was changed by Dost Mahomed himself. As he rode back after the victorious charge he thought over his position. His imprisonment at Bokhara had not broken his spirit, but it had affected him by showing him that the Mohammedans of Central Asia could not be trusted to work together or to unite to beat back the ever-advancing wave of infidel aggression by the British on the south, and the Russians on the west. But more than this, the defection of his brother at Khooloom, and the surrender by him of his family, had convinced him that it would be

vain for him to continue to struggle to regain the throne that he had lost. The Kohistanees had risen before he joined them, and he had the satisfaction of showing that his bravery was in no way shaken by his misfortune, and of gaining a success of a most striking description. Now at least he could lay down his sword with honour. Accordingly, without telling anyone of his intention, he rode off the field with a single attendant, and on the following day reached Cabul and rode to the British Embassy.

As he approached it he saw Macnaghten returning from his evening ride. His attendant galloped forward and asked if the gentleman was the British envoy, and on Macnaghten saying that he was so, he then returned to his master; and Dost Mahomed riding forward, dismounted, saluted the envoy, and handed him his sword, saying that he had come to surrender and to place himself under his protection. Macnaghten returned it to him, and told him to remount, and they rode together into the residency, Dost Mahomed asking eagerly for news of his family, of whom he had not heard since their surrender. Being assured that they were well and were honourably treated, he was greatly relieved. A tent was pitched for him, and he wrote at once to his son, begging him to follow his example. He conversed freely with Macnaghten, gave him the history of his wanderings and adventures, and assured him that there was no occasion to place a guard over him, as his mind had quite been made up before he came in, and nothing short of force would compel him to leave. His only anxiety was that he should not be sent to England, and on Macnaghten assuring him that this would not be the case, and that an ample maintenance would be assigned to him in India, he became perfectly contented and calm.

As a result of his letter, three days later his eldest son, Mahomed Afzul, came into camp and surrendered. Dost

remained two days at Cabul, where he was visited by many of the British officers, all of whom were impressed most strongly by him, comparing him very favourably with the man for whom we had dethroned him. Macnaghten wrote most warmly in his favour to the Governor-general, urging that he should be received with honour and a handsome pension assigned to him. He was sent down to India with a strong escort, where he was kindly received by the Viceroy, who settled upon him a pension of two lacs of rupees, equivalent to £20,000.

Unfortunately, just at the time that the ex-Ameer returned to Cabul a European regiment, a battery of horse artillery, and a regiment of native infantry were recalled to India, and with them went Sir Willoughby Cotton, and the command for the time being remained in the hands of Sir Robert Sale.

Angus Campbell had not accompanied Sir A. Burnes when he left Cabul with the force which marched out to encounter Dost Mahomed, but had been left in charge of the office at Cabul. He was now his chief's first civil assistant, his temporary appointment to the civil service having been approved and confirmed by the Court of Directors at home in consequence of the very warm report in his favour sent by Eldred Pottinger and Mr. M'Neill. Sir A. Burnes, too, had in his letters spoken several times of his energy and usefulness, and on his return from his expedition through the passes, both Burnes and Macnaghten had reported most highly both of his volunteering to undertake so dangerous a mission, and of the manner in which he had carried it out. In return the directors had sent out an order for his promotion to a higher grade, and had ordered that a present of £1000 should be given him in token of their recognition of his conduct.

"Your foot is well on the ladder now," Sir A. Burnes

had said on acquainting him with the decision of the board. "You will now have your name on their books as one of the most promising of the younger officers of the Company, and you may be sure that they will keep their eye upon you. Macnaghten will shortly return to England, and I have long been promised the succession to his post. I shall certainly request, and no doubt my wishes will be acceded to in such a matter, that you should hold the position of my chief assistant. As such you will have many opportunities of doing good service, as you will naturally proceed on missions to the chiefs of neighbouring peoples, and will so qualify yourself for some important post in the future."

Macnaghten, indeed, was extremely anxious to leave. Bodily and mentally he had suffered from the strain and anxiety. He had been promised a high post in India, probably the succession to the governorship of Bombay, but it was considered advisable that he should remain at his present post till the country was more settled. The winter passed quietly. With the submission of Dost Mahomed and his sons there was now no rival to Shah Soojah, no head round whom those discontented with the Ameer's rule could rally. He was the less unwilling to remain, as he thought that an era of peace had now begun, and that his anxieties were at an end. He was soon, however, undeceived. On Shah Soojah's first arrival in India he had naturally looked to the Dooranees for aid against the Barukzyes, who had so long oppressed them, and had made many promises of remission of taxation as an incentive to their zeal. These promises had so far been kept, that no taxes whatever had been exacted from the Dooranees; but in view of the absolute necessity of raising an income for the expenses of the government, and for the personal expenditure of the Ameer and his favourites, it became necessary that all should contribute to some extent to the revenue.

Although this tax was but a tithe of that which they had paid under Barukzye rule, the Dooranees of the district of the north-west of Candahar rose in rebellion, and General Nott marched out from that city and defeated them in a pitched battle. For a time the movement was crushed, but the discontent remained. This was rendered more formidable by the fact that the Heratees had taken up so offensive an attitude that our mission there had been withdrawn, and proofs were obtained that its ruler was fomenting the discontent in the western province, and was encouraging the disaffected by promising them assistance.

In May more serious trouble arose, this time with the Ghilzyes. It had been determined to restore the dismantled fort of Kelat-i-Ghilzye. The tribesmen viewed the work with hostility, and assembled in larger numbers, and Nott sent a force against them under Colonel Winder, with four hundred British troops, a Sepoy battalion, a battery of horse artillery, and a small body of cavalry. The Ghilzyes advanced to the attack in great force. The battle was long and desperate, but the volleys of grape from the guns, and the steady fire from the infantry, at last turned the scale, and after five hours' fighting the Ghilzyes retired. The Dooranees were again in arms, and three thousand men were assembled under their chief at Girishk. A small force, under Colonel Woodburn, marched out against them and defeated them, but having no cavalry on which he could rely, he could not prevent the rebels from retiring in fair order. Major Rawlinson, the political officer at Candahar, again warned Macnaghten that the situation in western Afghanistan was extremely threatening, but was answered that this was an unwarrantable view of our position, and that there were "enough difficulties, and enough of croakers, without adding to the number needlessly."

But Rawlinson was perfectly right, and Macnaghten was

living in a fool's paradise. The defeated chief of the Dooranees was joined by another, and in August a force of eight hundred cavalry, of whom some were regulars, three hundred and fifty infantry, and four guns, under Captain Griffin, met the insurgents. They were strongly posted in a succession of walled gardens and small forts, but the fire of the guns and infantry drove them from the enclosure, and the cavalry then charged them with great effect and scattered them in all directions. Another defeat was inflicted upon the Ghilzyes in the same month. For the moment all was quiet again; the only drawback to Macnaghten's satisfaction was that Akbar Khan, Dost Mahomed's favourite son, was still in the north, and was reported to be gathering troops somewhere near Khooloom. In September Macnaghten received news of his appointment to the governorship of Bombay, and began his preparations for leaving Cabul, and Burnes looked forward to receiving at last the appointment for which he had so long waited. His position had been in every respect irksome. His views differed from those of Macnaghten; he saw the dangers of the position which Macnaghten refused to recognize. The reports he addressed to the envoy were generally returned with a few lines in pencil of contemptuous dissent; but he believed that with power to act in his hands he should be able to remedy the blunders that had been made, and to restore peace and contentment in Afghanistan.

The troops were now commanded by General Elphinstone, who had succeeded Cotton. He was a brave old officer, but almost incapacitated by infirmities. He obtained the post simply as senior officer, and was wholly unfitted for command in such a critical time and in such a position. Probably had it not been for the assurances of Macnaghten that all was going on well, and that the trifling risings had been crushed without difficulty, Lord Auckland would have

yielded to the opinion of his military advisers and appointed General Nott. Had he done so the greatest disaster that ever fell upon the British army might have been avoided.

Nothing could be worse than the position in which the British camp and mission were established. They were on low ground, commanded on every side by hills, and surrounded by forts and villages. They were nearly a mile in extent, defended only by so contemptible a ditch and rampart, that an English officer for a bet rode a pony across them. The commissariat compound was near the cantonment, and occupied an extensive space with the buildings and huts for the officers. It, too, had a rampart, but this was even less formidable than that which surrounded the camp.

Things had now settled down. Many of the officers had sent for their wives and children, and Lady Macnaghten, Lady Sale, and others were established in comfortable houses. The climate was exhilarating, the officers amused themselves with cricket, horse-racing, fishing, and shooting, and lived as if they had been at a hill station in India, instead of in a mountainous country surrounded by bitter foes. October came in quietly, though Pottinger, who was now in Kohistan, sent unfavourable reports of things there. But these were as usual pooh-poohed by Macnaghten. The latter's troubles with the Indian government, however, continued unabated. The expenses of the occupation of Afghanistan, amounting to a million and a quarter a year, were a terrible drain upon the revenues of India, and it had become necessary to raise a loan to meet the outlay, and the question of a withdrawal from Afghanistan was being seriously discussed.

None of the good results that had been looked for had been achieved, nor did it appear likely that the situation would improve; for it was evident to all unbiassed observers

that the Ameer was upheld solely by British bayonets, and that when these were withdrawn the whole fabric we had built up at so enormous an expense would collapse. The uneasiness of the Indian government was increased by the fact that a change of ministry was imminent at home, and that the Conservatives, who had always opposed the invasion of Afghanistan, would at once take steps for the withdrawal of the troops from the country; and the investigation which would be made into the whole affair would create intense dissatisfaction in England, and lead to the recall of the Indian politicians responsible for it. The news stirred Macnaghten to fury; but he saw that it was necessary to make retrenchments, and accordingly he largely cut down the subsidies paid to the chiefs. The consequence was, that the leaders of the whole of the powerful tribes, including those round Cabul, the Kohistanees, Ghilzyes, and Momunds, at once entered into a hostile federation against the British.

Sale's brigade, that was about to start on its way to India, was ordered to attack the Ghilzyes at Jellalabad, and on the 9th Colonel Monteith was sent with a Sepoy regiment, a squadron of cavalry, and a party of sappers and miners, to keep the passes clear. The force was, however, attacked at the first halting-place, and Sir Robert Sale marched with the 13th Regiment to clear the pass from his end. Joined by Monteith's force, he succeeded in driving the natives from their heights, the Sepoys and the British soldiers vying with each other in climbing the almost inaccessible crags. The 13th retired down the valley, and Monteith encamped in the Khoord Cabul pass. He was attacked at night, the enemy being aided by the treachery of the Afghan horsemen, who admitted them within their lines. They were, however, beaten off, and Monteith was joined by Sale on the following day. Negotiations were then opened with

the Ghilzyes; terms were made, but broken by the treacherous tribesmen a few hours after they had been signed.

On his way back to Jellalabad Sale was attacked more than once in great force, and with difficulty cut his way down. Macnaghten, who had determined to leave on the 1st of October, but had postponed his departure for a short time, wrote on that day that he hoped the business just reported was the expiring effort of the rebels.

Angus had remained with Burnes at Cabul. The latter was much depressed by the occurrences that had taken place. He had greatly disapproved of Macnaghten's wholesale cutting down of the subsidies of the chiefs.

"How unfortunate am I!" he said many times to Angus. "Had Macnaghten gone but two months earlier, this would never have happened. It has been money alone that has kept the tribesmen quiet, and the very worst form of retrenchment has been chosen. Had he gone I should have acted in a very different way. In the first place, I should have told the Ameer frankly that the troubles were solely caused by the rapacity of the men he had appointed to receive the taxes. These must be dismissed, and honest and faithful ones appointed in their place. It is the abominable tyranny with which the taxes—of which I believe but a small portion ever get into the treasury—are collected that has brought about the trouble. With proper administration the revenue could be doubled, and the taxation would press much more lightly upon the people than it does at present. Now the evil is done, and I shall have to take over the administration when everything points to a terrible catastrophe, with which my name will ever be associated."

CHAPTER XIII

THE MURDER OF SIR A. BURNES

OCTOBER passed quietly, and Macnaghten arranged to leave on the 2nd of November. Burnes had received several warnings as to the formidable nature of the confederacy of the chiefs. Mohun Lal, the principal moonshee, who had been down to Sale's camp, told him that if the conspiracy was not crushed in its infancy it would become too strong to be suppressed. Burnes replied that he had no power at present, but that as soon as Macnaghten left he would conciliate the chiefs by raising their allowances to the former point. On the 1st of November Mohun Lal again expressed his opinion of the danger. Burnes replied that he feared the time was coming when the British would have to leave the country. He was in one of his moods of depression, but from this he recovered in the evening, and congratulated Macnaghten upon leaving when everything was quiet.

At the very time he was speaking the hostile chiefs were assembled together, and were discussing the methods that were to be taken to overthrow the British power. They determined that the first step was to forge a document in the Ameer's name, ordering all the people to rise, and at the same time to spread a report that it was the intention to seize all the principal chiefs and send them prisoners to England. It was singular that they should not have waited a few days, for the Indian government had sent peremptory orders that the whole force at Cabul, with the exception of a single brigade, should return with Macnaghten to India.

The chiefs decided that as a first step a tumult should

arise in the city, and this they at once set about exciting. They had no idea that it would succeed, and none of them ventured to take any part in it, as it was only intended to excite the passions of the rabble of the city. Early the next morning a friendly Afghan brought Burnes news that the residency was about to be attacked. He did not believe the intelligence, as the city had of late been as quiet as usual; but on sending out some of his servants into the street they reported that there was certainly an unusual stir and excitement. He wrote to Macnaghten saying so, but stating that he did not think the matter at all serious, although at the same time he requested that a military guard should be sent to him in order to overawe any disaffected persons.

Angus had gone out early with Azim. The latter had for some days past spent his time in the city, and each evening had returned with the rumours he had gathered. The talk in the lower quarters was all of the understanding at which the chiefs had arrived, and the general opinion was that in a few days these would pour down with all their forces and annihilate the infidels.

Angus himself noticed the sullen expression on the faces of the lower class and the manner in which they scowled at him as he passed, and quite agreed with his follower that the troubles he had long foreseen were about to come to a head. When in the streets, too, he had an uneasy consciousness that he was being followed. Several times he turned sharply round, but in the throng of natives in the streets he could recognize no face that he knew. This morning the feeling was particularly strong, although, as he had often done before, he assured himself that it was pure fancy on his part.

"I am not conscious of feeling nervous," he said to Azim, "but I must be getting so. It has been a very anxious time all the year, and I suppose that without my knowing it it must have told upon me. However, I will turn down

this quiet street, and if anyone is following us we shall certainly detect him."

A hundred yards down another lane crossed the one he had taken. Azim had looked several times, but no one else turned down the lane, which was entirely deserted. As they passed the corner of the next lane some men suddenly sprang upon them. Cloths were thrown over their heads, and in spite of their struggles they were lifted up and carried along rapidly. In a couple of minutes they stopped. Angus heard a door open. They were borne along what he thought was a passage, thrust into a room, and a door was slammed to and locked behind them. They tore off their mufflers and looked around. It was a room of no great size, with strongly-barred windows. There were cushions on a divan that ran along one side. On a low table in the middle of the room were two cold chickens, a pile of fruit, a large jar of water, and two bottles of native wine.

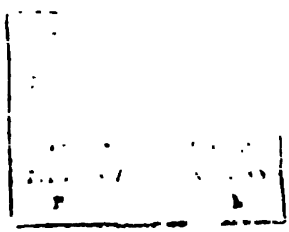
"What on earth does this mean?" Angus said, "and why have we been carried off?"

Azim did not attempt to reply.

"We are prisoners, that is certain," Angus went on; "but it would certainly look as if they meant to make us comfortable, and the room must have been prepared in readiness for our reception. I see no hope of getting away; the windows are very strongly barred, and," he continued as he walked across and looked out, "this little yard is surrounded by houses without windows on the ground floor, and with no door that I can see. I suppose there is one below us; anyhow, if we could get through these bars we should be no nearer liberty, for at best we could only re-enter the house, and possibly the door is fastened on the inside. There are certainly men in the house; I heard voices in the passage just now, and no doubt one of the fellows is stationed there.



AS THEY PASSED THE CORNER . . . . SOME MEN SPRANG ON THEM.



The only reason I can imagine for their carrying us off is that we are to be kept as hostages. Of course I am known to be Burnes's chief civilian assistant, and they might think that if I were in their hands he would be willing to make some concessions to get me back again. It is of no use worrying over it; we are not so badly off as we were in that snow-storm in the pass. The best thing we can do for the present is to make a meal, for we did not take anything before we started."

They had just finished their breakfast when the sound of musketry was plainly heard.

"There is fighting going on," Angus exclaimed. "What can it mean? There are no troops in the city except the native guards at our house and the treasury next door. It is either a fight between two factions in the city, or they are attacking our place. It is maddening being fastened up here just at this moment. The news brought by that Afghan this morning that we were to be attacked must be true, though Sir Alexander altogether disbelieved it. He was in one of his happiest humours this morning, as to-day he was to obtain the goal of his hopes and to be the resident political officer, with all power in his hands. When he is in that mood he disbelieves all unpleasant tidings, while in his fits of depression he gives credit to every rumour that reaches his ear. Still, the house should be able to hold out against a mob until help arrives from the camp; but whether or not, my place should be by his side whatever comes of it."

"If there is really a rising in the town, sir, we are certainly safer here than we should be in the streets, or even in the house."

"That may be," Angus said impatiently, "but my duty is to be there." He paced restlessly up and down the room.

Presently Azim said: "I can't think how the men who

troops. But in the end they will put down this tumult, and if Sir Alexander has been murdered, exact a heavy penalty for his death."

In half an hour the firing gradually abated, and the musket shots came more faintly through the air. "Our men are falling back, Azim, there can be little doubt about that by the sound. There cannot be any great number of troops engaged. What on earth can Macnaghten and Elphinstone be doing?"

The roar of shouting in the streets became louder, and there was an occasional sound of firearms. "It is quite evident that the mob are in entire possession of the city, Azim. They are looting the traders' quarter, and probably murdering all the whites who have taken up their residence there."

These fears were fully justified. The houses of Sir Alexander Burnes and Captain Johnson, the paymaster of the Ameer's troops, adjoined each other. Johnson had, fortunately for himself, slept that night in the camp. Sir Alexander had with him his brother, Lieutenant Burnes, and Lieutenant Broadfoot, his military secretary, who had just arrived. Curiously enough, it was the anniversary of the disastrous fight at Purwandurrah, in which fight Broadfoot's eldest brother had been killed. Soon after Angus had gone out the Ameer's minister arrived and repeated the warning already given by the friendly Afghan. Burnes could no longer doubt that there was danger, but he refused to leave his house, saying that as soon as the news that there was a tumult reached the camp, the troops would be at once despatched to put it down. He, however, wrote urgently to Macnaghten for support, and sent messengers to the most powerful native chief in the town begging him to calm the people, and assure them that all grievances should be redressed.

One of the messengers was killed on the way, the other managed to return to the house desperately wounded. The gathering in the street increased every moment. Burnes with the two officers went out on to a balcony, and from thence harangued the mob. His voice was drowned by yells and curses, weapons were brandished, and an attack was made on the doors of both houses. Part of the mob were fanatics, who thought only of slaying the infidels, but a still larger party were animated solely by a desire to share in the sack of the Ameer's treasury next door. The native guards both of Sir Alexander and the treasury opened fire, and for a time maintained themselves with the greatest bravery. Of the English officers, Broadfoot was the first to fall, shot through the heart. The position became more and more desperate. A party of the insurgents had set fire to the stables and forced their way into the garden. Burnes was still attempting to lull the fury of the crowd. Long ere this troops should have arrived to his rescue, but there were no signs that they were approaching. At last, seeing that all was lost, he disguised himself and went out into the garden with a man who had sworn by the Koran to convey him and his brother safely into camp. No sooner, however, did they issue out than the traitor shouted: "This is Burnes."

The mob rushed upon the brothers and hewed them to pieces. The defenders of the two houses fought bravely to the last, but were finally slaughtered to a man.

Sir Alexander Burnes owed his death to the faults of others rather than his own. Having been previously at Cabul as the British agent, and speaking the language perfectly, it was to him the people made their complaints, to him they looked for redress. They knew nothing of Macnaghten. When they found their condition growing from bad to worse, their taxes increasing, their trade at a stand-

still, food extremely dear, and employment wanting, it was on Burnes that they laid the blame; and yet he was all the time endeavouring, but in vain, to persuade Macnaghten that it was absolutely necessary to compel the Ameer to abandon a course that was exasperating for people of all classes, from the most powerful chiefs to the poorest inhabitants of the city. Burnes was unquestionably a man of great ability, and had he been in Macnaghten's place with full power and responsibility, things would probably have turned out differently.

The expedition from the first was a gigantic blunder, undertaken in the teeth of his remonstrances. In any case it was doomed to failure. It was impossible that we could maintain on the throne a man hated by the whole of his subjects—a race of fighting men, jealous to the last degree of their independence, and able to take full advantage of the natural strength of the country. But under the administration of an officer at once firm and resolute, and anxious to conciliate them in every way, the British force might have remained until the Indian government could no longer support the expense of the occupation, and could then have withdrawn quietly with the puppet who had proved himself so utterly incapable of conciliating the people upon whom we had thrust him.

The great fault in the character of Burnes was instability —his alternate fits of sanguine hopefulness and deep depression, and his readiness to believe what suited his mood of the moment. These characteristics were no doubt heightened by the unfortunate position in which he found himself. He had had every reason to expect that in view of his previous residence in Cabul and his knowledge of the character of the people, he would have the post of political officer of the Afghan capital, and he only accepted a secondary position upon the understanding that Macnaghten's appointment

was a temporary one, and that he would succeed him. When, however, months and years elapsed, and he was still without any recognized position whatever, when his advice was never adopted and his opinions contemptuously set aside by a man infinitely his inferior, he naturally came to take the worst view of things, and his fits of depression became more frequent. At last he fell, not because his house was isolated, for it could have held out until aid had come, but because the three men whose duty it was to rescue him—Macnaghten, the Ameer, and Elphinstone—were alike vacillating, undetermined, and incompetent.

The Ameer was the only one of these three to take any steps. When he heard of the riot he sent down a regiment of Hindoostanee troops to rescue Burnes. Instead, however, of marching outside the town to the end of the street in which Burnes's house was situated, they entered the city by the nearest gate, and tried to make their way through a maze of narrow lanes. Their advance was desperately opposed. From every house and roof a fire of musketry was kept up, and, after losing two hundred of their number, they fled in utter confusion to the shelter of the citadel. Elphinstone in his report says that he received the news at half-past seven that the town was in a ferment, and shortly after the envoy came and told him that it was in a state of insurrection, but that he did not think much of it, and expected the revolt would shortly subside. Macnaghten suggested that Brigadier Shelton's force should proceed to the Bala Hissar to operate as might seem expedient, while the remaining force was concentrated in the cantonment, and assistance if possible sent to Sir Alexander Burnes.

It was not, however, until between nine and ten that Shelton received his orders; and almost directly afterwards another note arrived telling him not to move, as the Ameer had objected. To this Shelton replied that in an insurrec-

tion of the city there was no time for indecision, and recommended the general at once to resolve upon what measures he would adopt. He was then told to march immediately to the Bala Hissar, where he would receive further instructions from Macnaghten. Just as he was marching off, a note came from this officer telling him to halt for further orders. He sent an engineer to ask the reason for this order, but the officer was cut down by an Afghan while dismounting just outside the square where the Ameer was sitting. Soon after this the military secretary himself came with orders for him to enter the citadel. When he arrived there, the Ameer asked him who sent him and what he came there for, and he was forbidden to enter the town. All that he could do was to cover the retreat of the Ameer's Hindoostanee troops. In consequence of all these delays, it was twelve o'clock before Shelton moved into the Bala Hissar, by which time Burnes and his friends had been murdered and the riot had spread. Houses were burned, shops sacked, and the families of several British officers massacred.

It is certain that had the slightest energy been shown, and had a small body of troops been despatched when Burnes's first request for help arrived, the riot would have been nipped in the bud, for all accounts agree that for a considerable time not more than three hundred men took part in the attack, and even when Shelton urged the necessity for prompt measures Burnes might have been saved. Except in the case of the rising at Meerut in the Indian Mutiny, never did such disastrous effects result from the incompetence of a British general.

The day passed slowly to Angus. It was maddening to be helpless when great events were happening. Until it became quite dark no one came near them, but at seven o'clock they heard the bolt of the door withdrawn, and a

man entered with a torch, by whose light they at once recognized Hassan, their guide over the passes.

"You here, Hassan!" Angus exclaimed. "I had always thought of you as back again in your tower near Bamian. Is it you who has thus made us prisoners?"

"We were sorry to use force, effendi, but there was no other way. Sadut Khan charged us to look after your safety, and we have kept you in sight for some days. He was living in this house in disguise. He was absent yesterday evening to take part in the conference with the other chiefs, and did not return until after midnight. Then he said, 'There will be a tumult in the city to-morrow, Hassan, and probably the house of the officer Burnes will be attacked. What will come of it I do not know. I myself and the other chiefs are leaving at once, so that if things go badly we can disavow any connection with the affair. The young officer, my friend, is, as you know, at Burnes's house. He must be rescued. Prepare this room for him. If he leaves the house before the attack begins, you must seize him and carry him in here. If his servant is with him, bring him also; he too must be saved. He waited on me kindly, and did all in his power for me. If he should not leave the house, then you and your followers must join the mob and keep together, forcing yourselves to the front, so that you will be the first to enter the house. Take long cloaks to throw round them, and get them out, even at the cost of your lives.'

"I told him that it should be done. You saved his life, and you also saved ours, for we should have been suffocated in the snow-storm had you not cut your way out and come to our rescue. So it has been done. We were glad indeed when we saw you come out. Had you not turned down that lane, I should have come up and accosted you, and,

telling you that I had an important message to deliver to you, should have asked you to come with me to a quiet spot, where I might deliver it safely. As it was, directly you turned down, we ran round, and, as you know, captured you without noise and without being observed by you. You will, I trust, pardon me for having laid hands on you; but I had orders from the Khan, who told me that I should have to use force, as he was sure you would not, however great the danger, be persuaded to leave Burnes."

"What has happened?"

"The Englishman and two others with him have been killed. One of the Ameer's regiments entered the town, but was driven back. There is looting going on everywhere. Many have been killed, and many houses burnt."

"But what is our army doing?"

"Nothing. There is a force at the Bala Hissar, the rest are under arms in their camp."

"It seems impossible!" Angus exclaimed. "However," he went on, stifling his indignation for the time, "I have to thank you deeply, Hassan, you and Sadut Khan, for having saved our lives. Assuredly you took the only way to do so; for had you only told me of the danger that threatened Sir Alexander Burnes, I should have returned to warn him and share his fate, whatever it might be. As it was, I cannot blame myself that I was absent. I thank you with all my heart. Pray tell the Khan when you see him that I am deeply grateful to him. He has nobly redeemed his promise, and I hope some day to thank him in person."

"Now, sahib, we will start at once," Hassan said. "I have clothes for you to put over your own, and there is no fear of our being suspected. We will take you to within shot of your camp."

He called out, and his four men entered, bringing with them Afghan disguises. When these were put on, they sallied

out at once. The five men were fully armed, and long Afghan guns were given to Angus and Azim. The streets were full of people, for the most part in a state of wild excitement, though the better class looked grave at the prospect of the retribution that would probably fall upon the city, perhaps to-morrow or certainly in a day or two. None paid any attention to the group, who differed in no respect from the majority of those around them. Issuing from one of the gates, they made their way to the cantonments. When within a few hundred yards the Afghans stopped. After a hearty farewell and renewed thanks, Angus and Azim left them. They had taken off their disguises, and offered them to Hassan to carry back, but he said, "You had best keep them; you may want them again. There is no saying what may happen." And they accordingly carried them with them.

In a short time they were challenged by a sentry, and halted till the latter had called a sergeant and four men. Then they went forward. Angus was recognized at once, as he was known by sight to everyone in the camp. In a short time they met an officer, who told them the news of the massacre of Burnes, his brother, and Broadfoot, and their guard, which was already known, as one man had escaped the general slaughter, and had, after hiding for some hours, come into the camp. Angus went at once to Macnaghten's house and sent in his name. The envoy came out into the hall. "I am glad to see that you have escaped, Mr. Campbell. I thought that all had perished, though your name is not specially mentioned as among the victims."

"I was not in the house, sir," Angus replied. "Sir Alexander Burnes had sent me out to gather information, and I and my servant were suddenly seized and carried into a house, where we were kept as prisoners all day. After it was dark we made our escape, having obtained disguises from a friendly Afghan."

"Well, I am glad," Macnaghten said; "but you must excuse me now, for the general is here, and we are holding a council. You had better for to-night take up your quarters in poor Burnes's tent. I shall have time to attend to matters to-morrow."

Although Burnes had his residence in the city, he had a large tent not far from the envoy's house. This he occupied when he had business in camp, and it was here that he received natives who brought him news, or who had grievances that they wished to report to him. Here Angus lay down for the night, with a deep feeling of thankfulness that his life had been spared, mingled with a foreboding that the troubles had only begun, and that there was yet much peril in store before the army were safely out of Afghanistan.

In the morning Angus again went up to the envoy's. "I have been thinking, Mr. Campbell," Macnaghten said when he entered, "as far as I have been able to think on any one subject, how your services can be best utilized temporarily. I think that, if you would not mind, you might be attached to the commissariat, and assist Captain Boyd and Captain Johnson."

"I will gladly do so, sir," Angus said. "I will take up the work at once."

"Anticipating your consent, I have already written a letter for you to take to those officers."

Glad to have work before him, Angus went at once to the commissariat camp. The two officers were at breakfast. Both rose and congratulated him heartily on his escape. "How on earth did you manage it?"

He gave as brief an account as he had done to Sir William Macnaghten, and then handed them the letter he had received from the envoy. "That is good news," Captain Johnson said heartily. "We shall be glad indeed to have your aid. I will have a tent pitched for you at once by the side

of ours. Of course you have not breakfasted. Sit down with us. What do you think of the state of affairs? You know a good deal more than we do of the disposition of the Afghan chiefs."

"I think things look very bad," Angus said gravely. "After what seems to me the imbecility shown yesterday, to which the death of my chief is due, it is impossible to feel anything like confidence in the general."

"That is the universal feeling in camp," Captain Johnson said. "If we had Sale here I believe everything would go right, but poor Elphinstone is only fit for a snug armchair in a comfortable club. He is no more able to cope with a crisis like this than an old woman would be. In fact, for choice I would take the average old woman.

"Orders have been given for an attack upon the town today, but it is more than likely that it will be countermanded. If Elphinstone can make up his mind to throw his whole force, with the exception of a strong camp guard, against the city, we should certainly carry it. No doubt there might be a considerable loss of life, but that could not be helped. It would certainly be successful. Then I should say we ought to turn the whole of the Afghan population out of the town, move all our provisions and stores there, and settle down for the winter. We could beat off any attack that the Afghans could make against us. As it is, we are terribly anxious about the stores. You know that I originally established all the magazines for the Ameer's army in the Bala Hissar. Then Macnaghten came up with the Ameer from Jellalabad, and he told me that the Ameer objected to the magazines being there. That was quite enough for Macnaghten. He always gives in to the Ameer's wishes, however ridiculous. So we had to leave the storehouses I had built and move out bag and baggage.

"The only place that I could get was the camel sheds

half-way between this and the town, and unless a strong garrison is sent down there the Afghans are certain to take possession of them. But Boyd's stores are even more important. They are within four hundred yards of the defences of the camp, and contain all our grain, our hospital stores, our wine and beer, our sugar, and everything else. And if his stores and mine are both lost, we shall have starvation staring us in the face at the end of a week. Just look out over the plain. Since daylight there has been a steady stream of men from the hills, and from all the villages round, flocking into the city; they have heard of the capture of my treasury, and are eager to share in the looting. If they succeed in capturing the stores and provisions, God help us all."

CHAPTER XIV

A SERIES OF BLUNDERS

NUMEROUS as had been the blunders, and great the mismanagement up to the 2nd of November, matters might yet have been retrieved had the conduct of affairs been in resolute and energetic hands. Macnaghten was personally a brave and fearless man. Had he at last felt the necessity for strong measures, an attack upon the city would certainly have been attended with success. Now that the first burst of hate and passion had passed, the inhabitants were filled with apprehension at the punishment that would fall upon them, and none doubted that the British army would at once attack the town. The army itself expected this, and, furious at the treacherous massacre of Sir Alexander Burnes and his comrades, were burning for the order to attack.

The troops were under arms early, but no orders were

issued for a forward movement. Some hours later the 35th regiment of Native Infantry, with two mountain guns, came in from Khoord Cabul, having brushed aside the opposition it had met with on its march. With this valuable addition to the fighting strength in the camp all opposition could have been easily overcome, and yet until three o'clock in the afternoon nothing whatever was done. By this time what could have been effected with comparative ease in the early morning had become a far more difficult operation. Vast numbers of the tribesmen had been pouring into the city since daybreak, and the two miles of plain between the camp and the city, which earlier in the day could have been traversed without a shot being fired, were now covered by a host of fierce enemies; and yet, after wasting so many valuable hours, the general, instead of throwing the whole of the force in the cantonments, and that of Brigadier Shelton at the Bala Hissar, against the city, sent only three companies of infantry and two guns to the attack.

Naturally this handful of men failed; and it was well for them that they did not penetrate into the city, for had they done so they would assuredly have been overwhelmed before they had gone fifty yards. However, the officer in command, seeing the impossibility of the task set him, withdrew his detachment in good order. The result of the day's operation, if it could be so called, was disastrous, the troops, who had until then been eager to be led against the enemy, and confident of success, were irritated and dispirited, and lost all confidence in their commander; while, on the other hand, the Afghans were jubilant over what they considered the cowardice of the enemy. The next day the misfortune invited by the passive attitude of our troops happened. Only eighty men were in charge of the commissariat fort. The little party were commanded by Lieutenant Warren. Early in the day a threatening

force of the enemy approached, and Warren sent a messenger urgently asking for reinforcements.

But the Afghans had already occupied an old fort that commanded the road between the camp and the commissariat fort. Considering the enormous importance of the stores, an overwhelming force should have been sent out to drive off the assailants, and to occupy the fort in such strength that it could be held against any assault. Instead of doing this, two companies only of the 44th Regiment were sent. The two captains in command were killed by the fire from the Afghan fort, other officers were wounded, and the men fell so fast that the officer who was senior in command, seeing the impossibility of reaching the store, drew them off. Then an order was issued—which was practically the death-warrant of the army—by General Elphinstone, for a party of cavalry to go out and bring in the little garrison. This party suffered even more severely than the preceding one. From every wall, building, and orchard a storm of musketry broke out, and the troopers, after suffering great loss, again retired. The news that the general intended to abandon the store struck dismay into the officers of the commissariat. Captain Boyd hurried to head-quarters, and urged the general to send a force that would sweep away all opposition, and to hold the fort at all hazards. The general promised to send a reinforcement, but no relief was sent.

As night was coming on, Captain Boyd and Captain Johnson again went to the general and pointed out in the strongest language the result that would follow the abandonment of the stores. The unhappy old man hesitated, but on a letter being brought in from Lieutenant Warren saying that the enemy were mining the walls, and some of the Sepoys, seeing their position was desperate, were deserting, he promised that a strong detachment should be send at two o'clock in the morning to storm the Afghan fort and relieve the

guard at the commissariat stores. Orders were accordingly issued, but these were presently countermanded, and it was decided that the force should not move until daylight.

By that time it was too late. Warren had repulsed an attack on the walls, but seeing that the enemy were preparing to fire the gate and renew the attack, he retired through a passage that had on the previous day been dug under the wall, and reached the camp in safety. But this was not the only disaster that happened that day. Captain Johnson's store of provisions for the use of the Ameer's troops, on the outskirts of the city, was also attacked. Captain Mackenzie, who was in command of the little garrison there, defended his post throughout the day with the greatest gallantry; but water was scarce, and ammunition failing, and large numbers of women and children were in the fort, with great quantities of baggage. Urgent letters were sent asking for reinforcements, but no reinforcements came. Had they arrived the situation would have been saved. The Kuzzilbashes were ready to side with the British. Several of their commanders were with Mackenzie, but when they saw that no help was sent, they refused to join a cause that seemed to them lost. All night the fighting went on, and all next day, until his men were utterly worn out, and the ammunition exhausted. No more could be done, and when night came on, he moved out of the fort and fought his way to the cantonments—a brilliant action, which showed what could be accomplished by a mere handful of men well led.

While Mackenzie was thus fighting for the stores under his charge, the troops in the cantonments were condemned to see crowds of Afghans looting the stores within four hundred yards of our camp, carrying off the supplies that had been garnered for their subsistence through the winter, and this without a man being set in motion or a gun brought to bear upon the plunderers.

Furious at the imbecility of their leaders, the soldiers clamoured to be led against the enemy. Unable to resist the demand, the general ordered the 37th Native Infantry to move out; but instead of being led straight against the enemy, the officer in command hesitated and halted, and soon fell back with the indignant Sepoys.

General Elphinstone was already talking of making terms with the enemy, and seemed to despair of victory when no attempt had been made to gain a success. On the 6th, however, a party of the 37th were again sent out under Major Griffiths. Again it was seen what could be done by an energetic officer. The Afghan fort was stormed, the enemy were driven out, and were routed by a party of horse, who dashed at them gallantly. The troops could be no longer restrained, and cavalry, infantry, and artillery poured out; but there was no general plan, and the consequence was, that although desultory fighting went on all day, nothing was accomplished. Had any general plan of operation been laid down, and a combined action fought, the enemy would have been utterly unable to withstand our troops, worked up to fury as these were by the disgraceful inaction that had been forced upon them. In the meantime, starvation would have already stared the troops in the face had not Captains Boyd and Johnson, aided by Angus and other officers of their department, gone out to the native villages and succeeded in purchasing a certain amount of grain. But already the troops were on half rations, and even these scanty supplies could not long be available.

The general, while his troops were out fighting, wrote to Macnaghten, urging that negotiations should be opened with the enemy, and saying, "Our case is not yet desperate, but it is becoming so very fast."

Macnaghten himself was conscious of this, conscious that, under such leading, the situation was fast becoming desper-

ate, and he employed the moonshee, Mohun Lal, who was still in Cabul under the protection of the Kuzzilbash chief, to endeavour to bribe the chiefs of the Ghilzyes. Two lacs of rupees were offered. The chiefs gave a favourable reply, and then Macnaghten, with his usual instability, was seized with a suspicion that they were not sincere, and abruptly broke off the negotiations, thereby mortally offending the Ghilzye chiefs.

Fresh danger was threatening in another direction. Mahomed Akbar Khan, the second son of Dost Mahomed, was on his way with a force from the north, and had already advanced as far as Bamian. Mohun Lal suggested that an emissary should be sent to offer him a large allowance if he would join the British. His suggestion was carried out, and money was spent in other quarters lavishly.

But it was now too late. A quarter of the sum would, a fortnight earlier, have sufficed to satisfy the demands of all the chiefs of the tribesmen. Now that success had encouraged the assailants of our force, and the whole population had taken up arms against us, inspired alike by fanaticism and hatred and thirsting for blood, it was doubtful whether even the chiefs could restrain them had they chosen to do so.

In their letters and journals the officers still spoke with kindness and respect of their unfortunate general. He had been a brave and able soldier, but age and terrible infirmities had rendered him altogether incapacitated for action. He had for months been suffering from gout, and had almost lost the use of his limbs. Only once or twice, after his arrival to assume the command, had he been able to sit on horseback; for the most part he was wholly unable to walk. Sometimes he was confined altogether to his couch; at others he was able to be taken out in a palanquin. His mind was also enfeebled by suffering. On the very day of the first

outbreak he had been a little better, and had mounted his horse; but he had suffered a very severe fall, and was carried back to his quarters.

It was altogether inexcusable that Lord Auckland, against the advice of the commander-in-chief and the remonstrances of his other military advisers, should have appointed such a man to a command which, beyond all others in India, demanded the greatest amount of energy and activity. There were many men who might have been worthily selected, men with a knowledge of the political conditions of Afghanistan, of the feelings of the people, of their language and of their country.

General Elphinstone knew nothing of these things, and depended entirely upon the advice of others. Had he relied solely upon that of Macnaghten, things might have gone differently, but he asked advice from all around him, and took the last that was offered, only to change his mind again when he heard the opinion of a fresh counsellor. He was himself conscious that the position was too onerous for him, and sent down a medical certificate of his incapacity for action, and requested to be relieved. The request had been granted, and he was to have returned to India with Macnaghten, but unhappily no other officer had been appointed to succeed him. It is upon Lord Auckland, rather than upon the unfortunate officer, who, in the teeth of the advice of his counsellors and of all common sense, was thrust into a position for which he was wholly unsuited, that the blame of the catastrophe of Cabul should be laid.

Macnaghten, in hopes that Brigadier Shelton, a brave officer, but hot-tempered and obstinate, would be able to influence the general and to put an end to the deplorable indecision that paralysed the army, persuaded Elphinstone to send for him to come in from the Bala Hissar to the camp and bring in with him a regiment of the Ameer's troops. He came

into the cantonment of the 9th, and his arrival was hailed with the greatest satisfaction, as it was believed that at last something would be done. Unfortunately, however, Shelton's energy and the general's weakness were as oil on water. No two men were less calculated to pull together. Shelton enforced his arguments with a vehemence that seemed to the general insubordinate in the extreme; while the brigadier, on the other hand, was unable to make allowance for the physical and mental weakness of the general, and was maddened by the manner in which orders that had but an hour before been issued were countermanded.

On the morning of the 10th the enemy mustered in great force, and occupying a small fort within musket-shot of the defences, opened a galling fire. Macnaghten only obtained the general's consent to a party going out to capture the fort by telling him that unless he gave the order he should himself take the responsibility of doing so, for that at any risk the fort must be captured. Thereupon Shelton was instructed to take two thousand men and attack it. When they were on the point of starting Elphinstone countermanded the orders. Shelton, in a fury, laid the case before the envoy, who was as eager as himself, and the general was again persuaded to give the order and the force advanced.

It was intended to blow open the gate with powder, but by some accident only a wicket by the side of the main entrance was blown in. Led by Colonel Mackrell the storming party, consisting of two companies of Europeans and four of native infantry, advanced. They could with difficulty make their way through the narrow entrance, for they were exposed as they did so to a heavy musketry fire, but two officers and a few soldiers pushed through, and the garrison, believing that the whole column was following them, fled through the opposite gate. But unhappily they were not followed. A body of Afghan cavalry threatened

to attack the storming party outside, and these, native and British alike, were seized with an unaccountable panic and fled. In vain their officers endeavoured to arrest their flight. The events of the previous week had terribly demoralized them. Shelton set them a noble example by remaining on horseback alone, and at last shamed them into returning. Again the Afghan horse approached, and again they fled. Again Shelton's expostulations and example brought them back. The guns in the cantonments drove the Afghans off, and Shelton led his men up to the capture of the fort.

In the meantime the handful of men who had entered the fort had been engaged in a desperate struggle for life. The Afghans, discovering how small was the number of their assailants, re-entered the fort and fell upon them in overwhelming numbers. When Shelton's force entered, Colonel Mackrell had fallen mortally wounded, and was carried into the cantonments to die. Lieutenant Bird, with two Sepoys, were the sole survivors. They had, when the enemy poured in, taken possession of a stable and barricaded themselves there, and had successfully repulsed every attack. When they were rescued their ammunition was almost exhausted, but they were uninjured, and no fewer than thirty dead Afghans lying in front of the stable bore mute testimony to the steadiness and accuracy of their aim.

Several small forts were abandoned by the enemy, and a quantity of grain was found in them, but as no measures were taken to convey it into the camp, it was lost again when the troops retired. Desultory fighting went on all the afternoon without any decisive results, and the next two or three days passed quietly.

In the meantime the moonshee was making every effort to bring over some of the chiefs to our side. Macnaghten was sending off letter after letter to the political officer with Sale, urging the necessity for an instant advance of the force

at Jellalabad. On the 13th the enemy occupied a hill within range of the cantonment, and planting two guns there opened a steady fire. Macnaghten spent hours in endeavouring to persuade the general and brigadier of the absolute necessity for driving the enemy off the hill, but without success, and it was not until he took the responsibility upon himself that a detachment under Shelton was ordered to be sent. It was then four o'clock in the afternoon. The troops advanced in three columns, and the infantry rushed forward with such impetuosity that the two guns with them could not arrive in time to herald their attack. The detachment poured in a volley within ten yards' distance, but they were unsteady from their exertions in mounting the hill, and their fire took no effect. A minute later the Afghan cavalry charged down upon them. The attack was unexpected, the men in confusion, and the Afghans rode through and through the ranks. The British troops retreated down the slope, where they re-formed behind the reserve; the guns opened fire with great effect, and the infantry again marched up the hill.

Our cavalry now came into action and drove the enemy before them. The infantry carried the height, and the enemy fled, abandoning their guns. It was now getting dark. A party of the Ameer's infantry removed one of the guns; but the Afghan marksmen were keeping up a heavy musketry fire, and the troops, British as well as Sepoys, were so demoralized that they refused to advance and carry off the other. It was therefore spiked and rolled down the hill, while the smaller gun was brought by the Ameer's troops into the cantonment. The enemy, now strongly reinforced, attempted to intercept the retreat, but were beaten off.

On the 15th Major Pottinger and another officer came in wounded, and reported that the Ghoorka regiment that had been retiring from Kohistan had been entirely destroyed.

They defended themselves courageously against overwhelming forces, and held the barracks they occupied until maddened by thirst; then they rushed to a stream, where the enemy fell upon them and cut them to pieces, the two mounted officers alone escaping after innumerable dangers. On the 17th Macnaghten heard that there was no hope whatever of assistance from Sale, who was himself surrounded with difficulties. He now urged that the force should all retire to the Bala Hissar, behind whose strong walls they could have maintained themselves. But Shelton vehemently opposed the step, which would have saved the army from destruction, urging that the abandonment of the cantonments would be an acknowledgment of defeat.

On the 23rd of November the enemy again appeared on the hill from which they had been driven, and a strong force moved out against it. Strangely enough, however, they only took one gun with them. The day was disgraceful as well as disastrous, for the British force was signally defeated and the gun was lost, and the troops re-entered the cantonment in headlong flight, hotly pursued by the Afghans till they reached the protection of the earthworks. Their conduct showed how completely the imbecility and vacillation of their commanders, and the effect of the insufficient rations on which they had to subsist, had destroyed the *moral* of the troops. The men who a month before could have driven the Afghans before them like sheep, were now unable to cope with them even when in superior numbers.

On the 24th Elphinstone addressed a letter to Macnaghten stating his opinion that their position could no longer be maintained, and that he should at once enter into negotiations with the enemy. He accordingly sent a message to the insurgent chiefs inviting them to send in a deputation to discuss the conditions of the treaty. Two of their leaders came in, but as they demanded that the British should sur-

render at discretion, giving themselves up, with all their arms, ammunition, and treasure, as prisoners of war, Macnaghten resolutely rejected the offered terms.

Angus had been constantly employed from the day he reached the cantonments. His work was to go out with small parties of the natives employed by the commissariat to bring in the grain that Boyd and Johnson had purchased. There was no slight risk in the work, for although the villagers were glad to sell their corn on good terms, the party who fetched it ran the risk of being cut off by any band of tribesmen they might encounter.

Of an evening he talked over the situation and prospects with the two officers. Absorbed in work as they all were, they were less influenced by the feeling of hopelessness than those who had nothing to do but to rage over the trap into which they had fallen through the incapacity of their leaders. Still, they did not attempt to disguise from themselves the magnitude of the danger.

"I have no faith in any treaty that could be made," Boyd said. "An Afghan is only bound by his word as long as it pays him to keep it. They will take Macnaghten's money, and will promise that we shall be allowed to go down the passes without molestation; but I am mistaken indeed if we shall not be attacked the moment we enter them. If they do so, few of us will ever get through. The men are weak now from want of sufficient food. They are utterly dispirited and demoralized, as is shown by their shameful flight yesterday. Besides, they will be encumbered with a host of camp followers, women, and children. I am still of opinion that our only hope is to take refuge in the Bala Hissar, and Shelton's vehement opposition has already put a stop to that. For myself, I would rather that they attacked us here, even if the attack meant our annihilation. It would be better to die so than cooped up hopelessly in the passes. At best the

march would be a terrible one. The cold is severe already, and we hear that the snow is deep in the passes; not so deep as to render them impracticable, but deep enough to render the passage a terrible one."

"Of course we are bound to stay with the rest and do our best to the end. Were it not for that, we three might escape. We all speak the language well enough to pass as natives. You, indeed, have already done so. However, of course that is not to be thought of; indeed, it would probably amount to the same thing in the end, for we could scarcely hope to reach either Jellalabad or Candahar."

"No, it is not to be thought of, Johnson," his companion said. "We have to do our duty to the last. I still hope that the general may yet have an hour of inspiration and deliver battle in good order. I believe that the troops would fight well if they did but see that they were properly handled."

On the following day they learned that Akbar Khan had arrived. He was greeted with great enthusiasm and much firing of guns. Macnaghten had a faint hope that he would side with us, as his father, mother, and brothers were in our hands in India; but, on the other hand, he had every reason for bitter animosity against the British, who had, without any ground for complaint, invaded the country and dethroned his father. The prince bore the reputation of being frank, generous, and far brighter and more cheerful than the majority of his countrymen; at the same time he was passionate and impulsive, given to sudden bursts of anger. The wrongs that he and his family had suffered were, indeed, at present predominant in his mind. For two years he himself had been an exile from his country. His father, who had tried so hard to gain the friendship of the British, had been dethroned by them; and as it was notorious that their captives were always honourably treated, he felt that no action upon his part would recoil upon their heads.

He himself was now the heir to the throne if he could win it. He was extremely popular among the people, who hailed his advent as giving them a leader whom they could rely upon, under whom the chiefs of the tribesmen could lay aside their mutual jealousy and animosity and join in the effort to drive the foe for ever from their country. He did not, however, at once assume the chief authority. The Nawab Mahomed Zemaun Khan, a cousin of Dost Mahomed, had been proclaimed Ameer by the tribesmen, and all orders were sent forth in his name. He was a man of humane and honourable nature, of polished manners, and affable address.

As soon as he learned the state of affairs, Akbar Khan took immediate steps to prevent further supplies being taken into camp. He burned the villages where grain had been sold, and placed bands of men to attack any parties coming out from the camp to purchase grain. Day after day passed, messengers came and went between Macnaghten and the Nawab, but nothing was done; the food supply dwindled; only three days' rations remained in camp.

The supplies doled out were scarcely sufficient to keep life together. The oxen and other baggage animals were in such a state of starvation as to be wholly unfit for service. The store of fuel had long been used up, some men died of cold, and all suffered much. Macnaghten was still hopeful, and early in December again urged a retirement, but in vain. The enemy had now guns planted in several positions, and kept up an almost constant cannonade on the camp. On the 8th there were but three days' half rations left, and the general informed Macnaghten by letter that it was absolutely necessary to surrender upon the best terms that could be obtained; and the three senior officers also signed the letter, saying that they concurred in it. On the 11th there was but one day's food left for the fighting men, the camp followers were starving. Again and again Macnaghten urged that a force

should sally out and at all costs bring in provisions, but the general knew that the men could not be relied upon to fight. The time had come when even Macnaghten saw that all hope had gone save in surrender. He drew out the rough draft of a treaty, and met the leading chiefs of the Afghans at about a mile from the river.

By this treaty the British were to evacuate Afghanistan. They were to be supplied with provisions for the journey, Shah Soojah was to abdicate, and to have the option of accompanying them; but if he did so, his wife and family were to remain as hostages until Dost Mahomed and his family were released. The troops at Jellalabad were also to retire, as well as those at Ghuznee and Candahar. Four British officers were to be left as hostages, to return to India on the arrival of Dost Mahomed and his family on the frontier. The conference lasted two hours, and its main stipulations were agreed to. The meeting then broke up, on the understanding that the British troops were to evacuate the cantonments in three days, and that provisions should in the meantime be sent in. The treaty was a humiliating one, but Macnaghten was not to blame for it. When the three military chiefs had declared that there was nothing for it but surrender, he was forced to make the best arrangement he could, and the terms of the treaty were as good as could have been expected in the circumstances.

When the conference broke up Captain Trevor, one of Macnaghten's staff, accompanied the chief to the city as a hostage for the sincerity of the envoy. On the 11th the Bala Hissar was evacuated. Akbar Khan pledged himself to conduct the garrison safely to the cantonments, and kept his promise, succeeding in inducing the crowds of horsemen who gathered round to let the little detachment pass. The provisions, however, were not sent in as agreed, and the chiefs refused to send them until the garrisons were with-

drawn from the forts they occupied round the cantonments. The parties were each suspicious of the other's good faith. On the 18th snow began to fall heavily. Macnaghten tried desperately to win over some of the chiefs, lavishing money among them. The Afghans made fresh demands, and demanded more hostages, and Lieutenants Conolly and Airey were handed over to them.

On the 22nd Akbar Khan sent in fresh proposals, to the effect that the British were to remain in Afghanistan till the spring, and then to withdraw as if of their own free-will. Shah Soojah was to remain as Ameer, and Akbar as his minister. As a reward for these services Akbar was to receive an annuity of £40,000 and a bonus of £300,000. Macnaghten accepted the terms, and agreed to meet Akbar. The offer was so strange that Elphinstone and others thought that it was probably a plot. Macnaghten replied that he did not think that it was so, but in any case he would go. After breakfast he sent for the officers of his staff, Lawrence, Mackenzie, and Trevor, who had returned, and begged them to accompany him to the meeting. An hour later they set out with a few horsemen. As they rode on Macnaghten admitted to his officers that he was well aware that it was a dangerous enterprise, but that he was playing for a heavy stake and the prize was worth the risk. "At all events," he said, "a thousand deaths are preferable to the life I have of late been leading."

The parties met at some hillocks six hundred yards from the cantonments, where some horse-cloths had been spread upon the snow by Akbar Khan's servants. Macnaghten presented to Akbar a splendid horse he had admired. They dismounted, and Macnaghten took his place on the blankets. Trevor, Mackenzie, and Lawrence sat behind him. Suddenly the envoy and his companions were violently seized from behind. The three officers were dragged away, and

each compelled to mount horses ridden by Afghan chiefs, who rode off through the crowd. Trevor unfortunately slipped from his insecure seat, and was instantly cut to pieces, while the other two reached Mahomed Khan's fort alive. In the meantime the envoy himself was struggling desperately on the ground with Akbar Khan. Exasperated by the resistance of his victim, whom he had only intended to seize, the Afghan's passion blazed out, and drawing from his girdle a pistol, which Macnaghten had given him the day before, he shot him through the body. Instantly his followers closed round and hacked him to pieces.

Thus died a gentleman who, in other circumstances, might have made a great reputation for himself. Possessed of unusual talent, his course was marred by his propensity to believe all that he wished, to disbelieve all that ran counter to his own sanguine projects. During the last month of his life he did all that man could do to avert a catastrophe, but he had been unable to instil his spirit into any of the military commanders, or to induce them to take the only course to redeem the position, by giving battle to the foe that surrounded them. He was the author of the ill-fated expedition to Afghanistan, he was its noblest victim. His peculiar temperament was fatal to him. Even when there was no longer any ground for hope he still continued to be sanguine. He had all along believed in himself, and scoffed at the warnings of men who knew the country and people—of Burnes, Rawlinson, Pottinger, and others.

He was thoroughly sincere; he was always able to convince himself that what he believed must be true, and he acted accordingly. He was not a strong man; had he been so the course of events might have been altered. He deferred in every way to Shah Soojah's wishes, however much these might be opposed to his own judgment. He allowed him to misgovern the country, to drive the natives to desperation

by the exactions of his tax-gatherers, and to excite the bitterest animosity of the chiefs by the arrogance with which he treated them. A strong man would have put a stop to all this—would have intimated to the Ameer that he held the throne solely by the assistance of British bayonets, and that unless he followed British counsels he would at once yield to the oft-repeated wishes of the Indian government and order the retirement of the troops.

CHAPTER XV

A DOOMED ARMY

EVEN the murder of the British envoy within sight of the camp failed to arouse the military authorities from their deadly lethargy. Sullenly the troops remained in their cantonments. Not a man was put in motion to avenge the deed or to redeem the honour of the army. The only idea was to renew the negotiations that had been broken short by the murder of their political chief. The commissariat had nothing to do. Beleaguered as they were, it was impossible to collect provisions unless a strong force was sent out, and the military authorities refused to allow a man to be put in motion. They had no confidence in their soldiers, and the soldiers had none in them. It was their leaders who had made them what they were. Macnaghten in his wrath had spoken of them as miserable cowards, but they were not cowards. They had at first full confidence in themselves, and if ordered would gladly have attacked the Afghan forces in the open and have carried Cabul by storm. But kept in enforced inactivity, while fort after fort was wrested from them without an effort being made to relieve the garrisons,

while the whole of their provisions for the winter were carried off before their eyes by an enemy they despised, and feeling that on the few occasions on which they were led from their entrenchments there was neither plan nor order —no opportunity for showing their valour, none for engaging in battle, they lost heart. Day by day they were exposed to continual insults from their exultant foes, day by day exposed to a heavy cannon and musketry fire, while the food served out was insufficient to maintain their strength—almost insufficient to keep them alive. It is not wonderful that their fighting powers were lost, and that they had become little more than a rabble in uniform.

Angus had now no official duties to perform, and he spent much of his time with his old friend Eldred Pottinger, now a major, who, after Macnaghten's murder, took his place, by right of seniority as well as of energy and talent, as chief political officer. He had been employed in the west, but had been sent to Cabul, and very shortly afterwards had proceeded to Kohistan, returning almost the sole survivor of the little force that was stationed there. His counsel since then had always been for energetic measures, but his voice, like that of Macnaghten, availed nothing. He had, however, taken no prominent part in affairs, having been confined to his bed by the wound he had received. He was now recovering from it, and took up the work with the same energy as he had displayed at Herat. As he said to Angus, "It seems to be my fate to have to do with incapable men. At Herat it was Yar Mahomed and Kamran, here it is Shelton and Elphinstone. Elphinstone and Kamran have both in their younger days been fighting men. Both are utterly worn out bodily and mentally by disease and age.

"Shelton is a brave man, a hard fighter, but his temper overmasters him. When in the field he shows personal gallantry, but no military capacity whatever. At first he was

always in opposition to the general; he has given that up as useless, and beyond always endeavouring to thwart his chief when the latter was roused to momentary flashes of energy by Macnaghten, he has sunk into a deep gloom, as if he regarded it as absolutely hopeless to struggle further. I would that any other than myself had been placed in the position I now hold. The terms proposed to Macnaghten were hard enough, they will be still harder, still more disgraceful, now. But however disgraceful they may be, they will be accepted by the military leaders, and my name will be associated with the most humiliating treaty a British officer has ever been called upon to sign."

His previsions were correct. Negotiations were renewed without the slightest allusion being made to the murder of Macnaghten, and as if such an event had never happened. While these were going on, little food was allowed to enter camp—enough to sustain life, but no more. At last the terms were settled. The Afghan chiefs agreed to supply provisions, and to send in baggage animals, upon payment being made for them. Six officers were to be handed over as hostages, all muskets and ordnance stores in the magazines, all money in the treasury, and all goods and property belonging to Dost Mahomed, were to be surrendered, and Dost himself and his family to be returned. No provision whatever was made for the safety of the man we had placed upon the throne. Pottinger endeavoured in vain to obtain better conditions. He received no support from the military chiefs; and even when at last he agreed to the terms, he did so with little hope that they would be observed.

Warnings came from friends in the city that no dependence whatever could be placed upon the chiefs, and that in spite of all promises the force would certainly be attacked on its way down through the passes. No step was taken by the chiefs to send in either provisions or carriage animals,

and the escort that was to accompany them did not make its appearance. On the 5th of January the military authorities determined to march out, contrary to the advice of Pottinger, who argued that without carriage and provisions, and without the protection of the chiefs as promised, the prospects of four thousand troops and twelve thousand followers being able to make their way down through the passes was small indeed.

Angus had come to rely very much upon Azim for information as to what was passing outside the cantonment. The latter had during the three years come to speak the Afghan language perfectly, and in the attire of a peasant often went out after dark, mixed with the insurgents, and entered the city. He had each time he went out brought back a less hopeful report than on the previous one, and Angus was the more impressed since the young fellow was generally cheery, and disposed to look on the bright side of things, taking indeed comparatively little interest in what was going on around him, having absolute confidence that his master would find some way out of any difficulty that might confront him.

"I quite agree with all you say, Azim, but I am powerless to act in any way. If I were here as a private person I should certainly disguise myself and endeavour to make my way down to Candahar, but as an officer I must remain at my post, come what may, and share the fate of the rest. But if you are disposed to try and get down, I will not throw any obstacle in your way, and will furnish you with money sufficient to pay your way either back to Persia or down into India, where, with your knowledge of languages, you will have no difficulty in finding employment."

Azim laughed. "No, master, whatever comes, I will stay with you. Just as you are in the employment of government and cannot leave, so am I in your employment."

Angus did not attempt to push the matter further, for he felt that it would be useless; and indeed, although he would have done what he could to procure his follower's safety, he felt that he would be a great loss to him in many ways. They had been so long together, and had gone through so many dangers in companionship, that he regarded Azim as a friend rather than as a servant.

"When you have been in the city, Azim, have you ever seen our friend Sadut?"

"No, sir; I have heard that he has been in the city many times, and that he was with the Afghan horsemen who drove our people in, but I have not seen him. Should I speak to him if I do so?"

"Yes, you might thank him in my name, and your own, for having saved our lives the other day; but on no account say anything to him about the future. I cannot make any overtures for help to a man who, though a friend of my own, is fighting against us. And indeed, however willing he might be to aid me to the best of his power, he could not do so. If we are really attacked in the pass, mixed up as we shall be with the camp followers, we could not be found in the crowd; and you may be sure that the tribesmen and the Ghazee fanatics will be mad with bloodshed and hate, and that even a chief would be unable to stand between them and their victims. Even if he were to send a messenger to me to say that he and his men would again save me, if I would let him know in which part of the column I shall ride, I should refuse to do so. It would be an act of treachery on my part to others, weaker and less able to take care of themselves than I am."

On the afternoon of the day when the force moved out of the cantonments Eldred Pottinger sent for Angus.

"Are you ready to undertake a hazardous mission?" he asked. "It is so hazardous that I would send no one upon

it, were it not that I consider that those who stay here are running as great a risk. After the murder of Burnes and Macnaghten, I have not the smallest faith in the chiefs keeping to their promises, and the manner in which they have failed now to carry out the terms of the treaty heightens my distrust in them. I do not believe that any of the messengers that have been sent down of late have succeeded in getting through; and indeed, until to-day it was impossible to say whether we should really start or not. The messages sent down were necessarily vague, and were indeed only requests for aid. I know, and no doubt Sale knows, that it is as difficult for him to fight his way up the passes as it is for us to make our way down; but now that, in spite of my advice, Elphinstone and Shelton and the other officers have decided to wait no longer, but to start at once, a specific message must be sent."

"I am ready to try to get through," Angus said. "I have no doubt that while we have been negotiating here, the tribesmen from all the country round have been gathering in the passes. The only way would be for me to join some party of men from the villages going that way. Once fairly in the pass and among the tribesmen, I could leave the party and mingle with others. Of course it would be slow work going on afoot, but I should say that it would be quite impossible on horseback."

"I have not much hope that the mission will be of any real use, for Sale is himself besieged in Jellalabad. Still, one must make an attempt. I shall enter in my journals —trusting that they will some day be recovered—that as a last hope I have accepted the offer of Mr. Angus Campbell to carry a message to General Sale saying that we are starting, and begging him, if it be possible, to make a diversion in our favour by advancing as far as he can to meet us. I will not give you any written document. You are well

known to many of the officers who went down with Sale, therefore no question can arise as to the message you bear being a genuine one. If you were searched and any letter found upon you, it would be your death-warrant. Still, I believe if anyone could get through alive, you can."

"I will do my best anyhow," Angus said, "and I will start as soon as it becomes dark. It is all easy enough as far as Khoord Cabul, after that I shall keep a sharp look-out; if I overtake any party of villagers I shall join them."

"I shall come and say good-bye to you before you start, Campbell."

Angus returned at once to his tent. "You have my disguise ready and your own, Azim?"

"Yes, sir, I have both ready, and have two of their long guns and some daggers and pistols."

"I have my own pistols, Azim."

"Yes, master, and it will be as well to take them; but they would be seen directly if you had them in your girdle."

"No doubt they would, Azim, but there are a good many English pistols among them now. There were three pairs they got at Sir Alexander's house, and there have been several officers killed since. I can give out that I took part in the fight at Sir Alexander's and got these pistols as my share of the plunder."

"Are you going anywhere, master?"

"Yes, I am going to try to get down through the passes to Jellalabad. We shall start as soon as it is dark. It will be a terribly dangerous journey, but I hardly think it will be more dangerous than going down with the troops."

"What are we to take, master? I will get it ready."

"There is not much that we can take. I will go down to the store myself and get eight or ten pounds of ground grain. There is not much of it, for the mills have all been smashed, and we have had to serve the grain out whole;

but I know that there are two or three sacks left in the stores. There is no meat to be had, nor spirits—not that I would take spirits if I could get them, for if they were found upon me it would excite suspicion at once. Another thing, I must stain myself. My face and hands are nearly as brown as those of the Afghans, but if we were searched and they took our things off, they would see in an instant that I was a white. I don't know how we are to get stain."

"I should think, master, that if we were to bake some grain quite black, and then pound it and pour boiling water over it so as to make it like very strong coffee, it might do."

"A very good idea. Well, I shall not want you for the next two hours. I shall go round and see some of my friends and say good-bye to them. Mind, whatever you do don't say a word to anyone about our leaving."

"I will be sure not to do that, master."

Azim went out to a little tent of thick native blanket a few yards from that of his master. There he sat looking through the entrance until he saw his master leave his tent. Five minutes later he issued out in his Afghan dress, long coat lined with sheep-skins, black lamb's-wool cap, high boots, and sheep-skin breeches, and at once set off at a brisk walk. There were at all times many Afghans in the camp, and indeed many of the camp followers had, since the cold set in, adopted the same dress; therefore no attention was paid to him, and no questions were asked by the sentries as he passed out at the gates. As soon as he got among the gardens and enclosures he broke into a run, which he continued until he reached a village a mile and a half away, and here he entered one of the cottages.

"Have you news for us?" one of the four men sitting there said.

"Yes, and good news. My master starts as soon as it is

dark. He will be on foot, and he is going to try and make his way down through the passes."

"That is good news indeed," the Afghan said. "I was afraid that we should never get a chance. Which road will he go by?"

"I can't say exactly, but he is sure to leave by the western gate. He would have more chance of getting away unnoticed on that side. Of course we shall both be in our Afghan dress."

"We will be on the look-out. I suppose that he will be armed?"

"Yes, he will carry one of your long guns and a brace of pistols. You had best choose some spot where you can close on him suddenly, for he would certainly fight till the last."

"We will be careful," the man said. "I don't want to get a pistol ball in my body. We shall follow at a distance until we find a convenient spot."

"He is sure to keep along at the foot of the hill so as to avoid your people on the plain."

"It will suit us best also, as we shall not have far to carry him."

"Mind, you must make a struggle when you seize me as if I was violently resisting. Then, when we start you must order me to walk, and threaten to blow out my brains if I try to escape. My master can learn the truth afterwards. If he were to know it now, he would be furious with me; but in a few days, when fighting is going on in the passes, and a great disaster occurs, he will thank me for having prevented him from throwing away his life, especially as he knows perfectly well that the English in Jellalabad could not come out to assist those here."

When Angus returned to the tent he found Azim busy roasting the grain. The Afghan costume had been laid aside.

"Everything is ready, master. The grain is nearly done, and it won't take me long to pound it up. I got a few sticks down at the stores and the kettle is just boiling."

"Then as soon as it is ready I will stain myself, but I sha'n't put on the Afghan dress until the last thing. Have you cooked some of the flour?"

"Yes, sir, I have made four cakes. They are baking in the ashes now. I thought perhaps you would eat one before we started, and we can carry the others for to-morrow."

"I wish, Azim," Angus said, "that there was some chance of this journey being useful, but I feel convinced that no good can come of it. The moonshee has sent in a report that confirms the rumours we heard. There can be no doubt that General Sale is strongly beleaguered in Jellalabad, and will have all his work to do to hold the place, and therefore it will be absolutely impossible for him to fight his way up the pass."

"Then why should you go, master?"

"Because I have been asked to go as a forlorn hope; and also because, however great the risk I may run, I do not think that it is greater than it would be if I went down with the army. We have no baggage animals. We have food for only three days more, and it will only last that time by cutting down the rations still further. The unfortunate camp followers are for the most part without warm clothing of any sort, and will die by thousands. As to the troops, I have no doubt that most of them will fight when they know that unless they cut their way through they are doomed, but their chance of victory is small. Here in the open plain they might even now, if well led and worked up to enthusiasm by a stirring speech, thrash the Afghans, numerous as these may be; but pent up in the passes, under a fire from every hillside by a foe they cannot reach—for in their present weak state they could never scale the moun-

tains—I believe it will be a massacre rather than a fight. At any rate, if we are to be killed, I would rather be shot as a spy than go through such awful scenes as there will be before a bullet finishes me."

"I don't want to die at all, master; but if it be the will of Allah, so be it. But, as you say, I would rather be killed straight off than struggle on through the snows in the passes and get killed in the end."

As soon as it became dusk, Angus and his follower put on their disguises. A few minutes later Eldred Pottinger came in.

"Well, as far as looks go you will pass anywhere, Campbell, and certainly as regards language there is no fear of your being suspected. The real difficulty will be in explaining where you came from. Every village has sent its contingent of fighting men, and if it happened that you met anyone from the place you pretended to come from, the consequences would be very awkward."

"I intend to give out that I have come down from Arcab, which is a little village to the south of Ghuznee. I went out there once with a detachment to buy some cattle. It is hardly likely that any of the men from that place would have come here, for they would naturally join the bands that are threatening our garrison there. Of course I can invent some story to account for my not doing the same."

Pottinger nodded. "Well, Campbell, I hope that you will get well through it. As I told you, I have not a shadow of hope that Sale will be able to lend a hand to us. Still, although it is but one in a thousand chances, I feel that it ought to be attempted; and in your case I say honestly that I consider there is no greater risk in your going down by yourself, and having your own wits to depend upon, than in going down with the army—if one can call this broken and

dispirited soldiery an army—for in that case the bravest and clearest head would share the fate, whatever that may be, of the dullest and most cowardly."

"I quite see that, and agree with you that nothing can be slighter than the chances of the army getting down safely. Be assured that whatever happens, so far from blaming you, I shall consider that you did the best for me by sending me on this mission."

"I will walk with you to the gate," Pottinger said. "In the daytime there is no check upon anyone passing in or out, but at night the sentries are on the alert, and as you are both armed, you would certainly be stopped."

A minute was spent in packing their scanty stores into the pockets of their coats, then they started for the gate. Here Pottinger, after seeing them through, shook hands cordially not only with Angus but with Azim, whom he had learned to like and value for the devotion he showed to his master in Herat. They proceeded on their way without meeting any parties of Afghans until they neared the foot of the hill, then, as they were passing along a path through an orchard, a party of men suddenly sprang out upon them, and they were thrown down on their faces before either had time to offer any resistance. Angus, indeed, had repressed the natural impulse to try to draw one of his pistols. Resistance would have meant death, and it seemed to him that these could only be plunderers.

"What are you doing, fools?" he exclaimed. "Do you not see that we are friends?"

No answer was given. His captors were binding his hands tightly to his side; then before raising him they muffled his head in a blanket. He was then lifted to his feet. He heard the men say to Azim that he was to accompany them, and that if he attempted escape he would at once be shot. A man on each side of him put his hands on his shoulder,

and one said: "You are to walk quietly with us; escape is impossible, and it were well for you not to attempt it."

Angus indeed felt that escape was out of the question. He was unable to conjecture into whose hands he had fallen. They were not bent upon plunder, for had they been so, they would have taken his arms, searched him, and probably cut his throat afterwards. It seemed impossible to him that they could know he was a British officer, and the only conceivable explanation he could think of was that men had been scattered all round the cantonment to prevent anyone from leaving, or going out with messages to one or other of the chiefs, and that they had seen him and Azim come out, had followed and seized them, and were now taking them to some chief to be questioned as to why they were in the British camp after dark, and for what purpose they had left. Certainly the affair reminded him of his friendly capture at Cabul; but it seemed to him altogether impossible that Sadut could have learned that he was about to start on a mission, or that had he even learned it, he could have known that he and Azim would have followed the road on which they had been captured. He soon found that the path they were following was an upward one, and as it became steeper and steeper, he was sure that he was being taken into the hills.

Once or twice he addressed his captors, but received no answer. He walked, as far as he could tell, for two hours. At last there was a pause. He heard a door open, and felt that he was being taken into a hut. Then for the first time the pistols and knives were taken from his sash. His captors, after addressing a few whispered words to some men who were already in the hut, retired, closing the door behind them and piling heavy stones against it. The blanket was then taken off his head. A bright fire was burning in the hut, which he saw was some fifteen feet

square. Four men, armed to the teeth, were standing by the fire. There was no door save the one by which they had been brought in, and it was evident that the hut consisted only of this room.

"You are unhurt, I hope," he said to Azim.

"Yes. I was knocked down before I had time to think of doing anything."

"Do you know where they have brought us?"

"No. They threw a cloth over my head."

"How could this have happened, Azim? I cannot understand it at all."

"No more can I, sir."

"When we started to fight against the infidels we never thought that we should be attacked by our own countrymen. It seems to me that there must be some mistake." Then he turned to the Afghans. "Why are we brought here? What harm have we done?"

"That I know not," the man said. "You must have done something, or our comrades would not have brought you here. That is their business."

"It seems to me," Angus said angrily, "it is our business too. Our tribe are not at war with any others, and it is a new thing that Afghans should attack each other when all are uniting to fight the strangers."

"I know nothing about it. I only know that our comrades brought you here, and left us to look after you. There are plenty of traitors among the men who have taken the infidel's gold. They will all be reckoned with when we have finished with the white men. Well, they did not tell us to keep you bound, and we will take off the cords if you swear by the faith that you will make no attempt to escape."

Angus hesitated. It seemed to him that if two of the four men slept he and Azim could, if unbound, snatch at their weapons, and at least make a fight for it; that chance would be gone if he gave his word.

"No," he said; "I will make no bargain with men who have deprived me of my liberty."

"Well, just as you like," the other said, seating himself by the fire, "it makes no matter to us."

"We may as well sit down too," Angus said, and advancing near the fire he sat down by the side of the Afghans. Azim did the same.

"Where did you say you came from?" the man who had been the spokesman of the party asked. Angus briefly named the village he had before decided upon, and then sat looking silently at the fire. He saw that his chance of being able to discover at present any plan for escape was very small. Presently one of the men said, "Let us have supper," and rising he went to a corner of the hut, where the carcass of a sheep was hanging from the rafters. He cut off a leg, divided this into slices, which he spitted on a ramrod, and then put it over the fire. In the meantime another had unceremoniously placed the four cakes that were taken from the captives in the embers to warm up. When the meat was done, the leader said to Angus: "We do not wish to starve you. We will untie the hands of one of you, and let him eat; when he has done, we will fasten him up again, and let the other eat in the same way."

This was done. When they were again securely bound Angus said in Pushtoo: "You may as well lie down now, friend. Perhaps in the morning the men who have taken us will find out that they have made a mistake and will let us go, with apologies for having treated friends so roughly." They lay down close together, but Angus was afraid even to whisper to his follower, lest it should excite the suspicion of their guard. For an hour he remained watchful, then he saw two of the Afghans lie down, but the other two lighted their pipes, and were evidently going to keep watch. He had tried quietly once or twice to see if the cords that bound him could be loosened, but he found that although

they had not been tied unpleasantly tight, they were securely fastened, and did not yield in the slightest to his efforts. He therefore gave up the idea of trying to free himself from them; and indeed, even if the guards should all sleep, the prospect was hopeless, for from the noise made in rolling the rocks against the door, it was certain that this could not be opened without waking the sleepers. It would therefore be necessary as a preliminary to kill all of them, and even then he might not be able to break open the door. At any rate, there was nothing to do at present. After trying in vain to discover an explanation of their capture he fell asleep. He woke several times in the night, but found that two men were always on guard. The next morning he heard the stones removed from the door, but no one entered. The Afghans breakfasted, and this time permitted their captives to share the meal with them. From time to time one or other of the Afghans went to the door and looked out, and at two o'clock one of them said, "The infidels are moving."

The others went out. "Have you thought of any way of escape?" Angus whispered in Persian to his follower.

"I can think of nothing," Azim murmured.

As there seemed no obstacle to their going out Angus joined his captors. He could see on the snow which covered the plain below, the dark masses of the troops surrounded by a host of camp followers, while beyond these hovered hordes of Afghans. From time to time horsemen rode in, evidently delivered some message, and then went off again.

The departure of the troops had been fatally delayed. It was ordered to begin at eight o'clock in the morning, and at that hour they stood to their arms. The day was clear and bright, and although four miles from the camp, Angus could clearly see what was going on. Although it was now two in the afternoon, only a portion of the troops

had left the camp, and it was not till six o'clock, when night had already fallen, that the rear-guard left it.

Already confusion had set in; the ranks of the soldiers were broken up by the terrified camp followers, and presented the appearance of a vast mob rather than an organized army. Had they started at the hour fixed they might have reached Khoord Cabul in safety, but the loss of time was fatal. Only six miles were accomplished, and it was two o'clock in the morning before the whole gathered, when it was seen that their numbers were already diminished. The wretched camp followers, accustomed to the heat of the plains of India, and thinly clad, were the first to succumb. Hundreds, especially of women and children, sat down in the snow and were frozen to death. Already the Afghans were hanging on the flanks, and sometimes making rushes and cutting down many of the unresisting multitude.

Soon after two o'clock a native came up to the hut and delivered an order to the Afghans, who at once cut up the remainder of the sheep, and divided it between them. Then their leader said, "We are to move." The ropes that bound the prisoners were loosened. One end was tied round the wrist of each captive, the other being wound round the waist of an Afghan, allowing a slack of a yard and a half. As soon as this was done the party moved off. They descended the hill for some distance, and then followed the lower slopes in the direction in which the army was moving. They kept on till long after midnight, and then halted at a deserted hut. Far behind them they could see the flames of the burning cantonments, which had been fired by the Afghans as soon as they had removed everything of the slightest value. In the morning Angus saw that their halting-place was high up above the entrance of the Khoord Cabul Pass. There was as yet no sign of the army, but in the

afternoon it was seen approaching in a confused mass. The night had been a dreadful one; soldiers and camp followers, horses and baggage and cattle were huddled in a confused mass. No warm clothes had been served out to the followers, and hundreds were frozen to death during the night, while others were so badly frost-bitten that they were unable to walk.

As soon as the troops started again the Afghan horsemen attacked the rear, seizing the baggage, capturing the guns, and cutting down all they encountered. At noon Akbar Khan, with six hundred horsemen, rode up. Pottinger sent Captain Skinner with six horsemen to communicate with him. Akbar said that he had been sent out by the Nawab to protect them from the attacks of the Ghazees. His instructions were to demand other hostages as security for the evacuation of Jellalabad, and to arrest the progress of the force, supplying it in the meantime with everything it required, until news of the evacuation of Jellalabad by Sale was received. The troops, however, did not halt until they reached the entrance of the Cabul Pass. The night was even more dreadful than the preceding day had been. The Sepoys burned their caps and accoutrements to obtain a little warmth, and numbers were frozen to death. At daybreak the crowd of soldiers and camp followers began to push forward, their only thought now being how to escape death.

Akbar Khan spent some hours in negotiations. Four more hostages were demanded; Pottinger volunteered to be one of them, Captain Lawrence had been specially named, and Pottinger chose Mackenzie as the third. It was agreed that the force should move down through the Khoord Cabul Pass to Tezeen, there to await tidings of the evacuation of Jellalabad.

CHAPTER XVI

ANNIHILATION OF THE ARMY

IN terrible confusion the crowd of fugitives—they were now nothing more—all entered the terrible pass. The Ghilzyes at once commenced their attack. In vain did Akbar Khan and his chiefs endeavour to restrain the fanatics. From the hillsides, from every rocky crag they opened a murderous fire. That day three thousand men fell, either from the musket fire or from the knives of the Afghans. The dooly-bearers had all deserted on the first day, the greater portion of the camels and ponies had been captured. So far the ladies had escaped; they all rode next to the advanced guard, as this was considered the safest point, for the soldiers here maintained some sort of order, and the Afghans, therefore, devoted their attention to the helpless crowd in the rear. Again the column halted in the snow.

In the morning the camp followers made another rush ahead, but the troops, who were ordered to march at ten o'clock, did not move, for in spite of all the remonstrances of the officers, the general countermanded the order, believing that Akbar Khan would send in provisions and troops to protect them. Another terrible night was passed, and then Captain Skinner rode into camp with a new proposal from Akbar Khan, namely, that all the English ladies of the force should be placed under his charge, and that they might be accompanied by their husbands. Pottinger remembering that Akbar Khan's family were in the hands of the British, and believing that he was sincere in his wish to save the ladies and children from destruction, sanctioned the proposal. Elphinstone at once accepted it. It was the choice of two evils. On the one hand Akbar Khan had

proved faithless, and on the other certain death awaited the ladies. They were insufficiently clad, had scarcely tasted food since they left Cabul, and had passed three terrible nights in the snow. Undoubtedly it was the wiser course to trust them to Akbar Khan. Accordingly a party of Afghan horse rode in, and Lady Macnaghten, Lady Sale, and ten other ladies, some twenty children, and eight officers rode away under their escort.

The next morning the survivors started. The Sepoys had already lost the greater portion of their numbers; the remainder threw away their guns, which they could no longer use owing to their hands being frost-bitten, and joined the disorganized rabble in front. They were attacked in a narrow gorge, and the pass was soon choked with dead and dying. Not a single Sepoy survived. Of the sixteen thousand men, soldiers and camp followers, that had left Cabul four days before, not more than a quarter were now alive. Akbar Khan watched the slaughter that was going on, declaring that he was powerless to restrain the Ghilzyes, whom even their own chiefs could not control. He advised that the remnant of the British army should lay down their arms and place themselves under his protection. The general very properly refused the offer, for Akbar Khan had already acknowledged that he was incapable of restraining the tribesmen.

The march was continued. The rear-guard was commanded by Shelton, and nobly they did their work, repulsing several attacks of the enemy, and giving time for those ahead to pursue their way. Before daybreak they started again in hopes that they might reach Jugduluk that day. Despair gave the soldiers strength, and they moved off quietly in order to obtain a start of the camp followers, who paralysed their action. The latter, however, were soon on their feet, and as usual endeavoured to push on ahead

of the troops. For some miles the retreat was uninterrupted, but presently a heavy fire opened on the rear-guard. The camp followers then rushed in a tumultuous crowd past the troops, and when, a little later, the head of the column was attacked, they again fled to the rear, not only hampering the movements of the soldiers, but carrying many of them away by the impetus of their rush. Steadily until day broke the Afghan marksmen maintained their fire. Soon afterwards the advanced guard reached a village ten miles from Jugduluk, and halting only till the rear-guard came up again pushed forward. Shelton, with a handful of the rear-guard, kept the Afghans at bay, and covered the retreat until all arrived in Jugduluk, where they took their post behind some ruined walls. There was, however, little rest for them; the Afghans, in ever-increasing numbers, posted themselves on the heights and opened a terrible fire. Three bullocks were found among the camp followers; these were instantly killed and served out to the famishing soldiers, who devoured them raw. Again Akbar's party approached, and Captain Skinner went out to remonstrate with him for permitting the continued attacks, but the Afghan prince declared himself incapable of repressing his men, as his orders were disregarded.

A handful of the 44th Regiment issued out and made a gallant rush at the enemy and drove them back, but as the main body did not follow their example, they again retired behind the ruined walls. All night long and through the next day the force remained at Jugduluk. Akbar Khan sent in a message inviting the general, Shelton, and Captain Johnson to a conference, and promised to send in provisions. This promise he as usual broke, and insisted on retaining the three officers as hostages.

The conference was resumed the next morning. Akbar now seemed in earnest in his desire to put a stop to the

slaughter; but the petty chiefs of the tribes between Jugduluk and Jellalabad were now present, and these would listen neither to his entreaties nor commands, nor to the offer of large sums of money. They thirsted for blood, and were determined to extirpate the infidels. Mahomed Shah Khan, to whose daughter Akbar was married, then came forward and asked whether the British would pay two lacs of rupees for safe-conduct to Jellalabad. The general agreed to this, and it seemed that at last the safety of the survivors was ensured. At eight o'clock in the evening the survivors, who now numbered but a hundred and twenty of the 44th and twenty-five artillerymen, again set forth. No provisions had been sent in during the two days' halt, and all were terribly reduced by famine. The Afghans rushed down among the camp followers, killing them unresistingly. The soldiers, however, held together, and, bayonet in hand, drove off their assailants until they reached the Jugduluk Pass. They struggled up the narrow and terribly steep ascent until when near the summit they came upon a barricade composed of bushes and branches of trees. Here the column was thrown into great confusion, the camp followers crowding upon the soldiers. The latter fought with desperation, while the Afghans massacred the unresisting camp followers.

Twelve officers fell here. Their number was large in proportion to that of the men. They had been no better clothed, and had suffered equally from cold and hunger; but they did not give way to the depression that during the first two marches had reigned among the troops. They were upheld, too, by the feeling of responsibility, and the necessity of keeping up an appearance of cheerfulness and hopefulness in order to encourage the men. After desperate fighting some twenty officers and twenty-five soldiers managed to break their way through the barricade, and at daybreak

reached Gundamuck. There were but two rounds of ammunition remaining in the men's pouches. Most of them were already wounded, but they were resolute not to lay down their arms, and when called upon to do so they refused. Then the mob of Afghans rushed down upon them. One officer and a few privates were taken prisoners, but seven officers succeeded in cutting their way through, and being mounted, left the Afghans behind them, and reached Futtehbad, but sixteen miles from Jellalabad. Here, however, they were attacked by the peasantry. Two were cut down at once; the others rode off, but were pursued and overtaken. Four of them were killed, and one only, Dr. Brydon, reached Jellalabad alive, the sole survivor of four thousand five hundred fighting men and twelve thousand camp followers, with the exception only of those who had been taken over by Akbar as hostages.

This, the greatest disaster that ever befell a British army, was due to the vacillation and weakness that had characterized every action since the murder of Sir Alexander Burnes. Had the force pressed forward at once on the morning when it left its cantonment, the greater portion would probably have reached Jellalabad, but two days had been lost before the army reached Khoord Cabul Pass, about ten miles from the city. There were fresh halts, fresh delays, fresh futile negotiations again and again, and during the time thus thrown away the enemy from all the mountains round were gathering in the passes to oppose them, and building the fatal barricade in the pass of Jugduluk. Had the force pushed forward with only an occasional halt of a few hours, they would not have been enfeebled by hunger. By slaying the baggage animals an abundance of food could have been obtained for all, the opposition they encountered would have been comparatively feeble, and cold would have

been their only formidable antagonist. Truly it seemed that a curse had fallen upon the army; that it was Divine retribubution for a most unjust and iniquitous war.

Each day Angus and his followers had been taken along, always being halted in positions whence they could see the terrible tragedy that was being enacted. Angus was half mad with grief and with fury that he was not in his place among the troops. Azim in vain endeavoured to comfort him, by pointing out that it was not his fault that he was not there, but that he had been sent away from the army by the order of his superior; and that even had he not been taken prisoner, he would not be a sharer in what was going on in the pass.

"That is true, Azim, but it is a poor consolation to me. I feel sure that Pottinger foresaw what would happen, and that it was as an act of friendship, in giving me a chance of getting through safely, that he sent me down. It was no doubt kindly meant, but I would a thousand times rather have shared the fate of the rest."

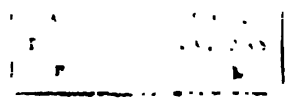
"Well, master, for my part I own that I am glad we are up here. I have no wish to be killed, especially as it would do no good to anyone. Why should a man throw away his life? Allah has given it to us, and we shall die when our time comes. But it would be wicked to throw it away uselessly."

"It is all very well to talk like that, Azim, when one is in safety, but when one sees one's comrades being slaughtered, a man would not be worthy of the name did he not long to be with them and to die fighting by their side. Indeed, we know not at present whether our lives are to be saved. We know not into whose hands we have fallen, or why we should thus be taken along to be spectators of this massacre. The whole thing is bewildering to me."

They now generally conversed in Persian. Their guards,



ANGUS WAS HALF MAD WITH GRIEF AND WITH FURY
THAT HE WAS NOT IN HIS PLACE AMONG THE TROOPS



although keeping as strict a watch as ever on them, interfered with them but little. Fortunately the worst scenes took place at night, and were therefore hidden from those on the hill, the incessant rattle of musketry alone telling of the relentless pursuit. On the night of the 12th the roar of fire had been louder than ever. At last it ceased suddenly. Angus and his guards alike remained awake, Angus listening in agony to the sounds of the combat, the Afghans talking together in low tones.

"What do you think has happened?" he asked them when some minutes had passed without the sound of a shot being heard.

"Either Akbar Khan has succeeded in persuading the Ghilzye chiefs to spare what few there are left of the infidels, or the last man has been slain."

Angus felt that the latter was by far the more probable solution, and throwing himself down on the ground he burst into tears. The eight days of mental suffering had shaken him terribly, and now, feeling that his worst fears had been realized, he broke down altogether. Before daybreak his captors moved some distance farther up into the mountains, and by the cautious manner in which they made their way, often pausing to look back and round, Angus concluded that they were desirous of avoiding all contact with their countrymen. He had indeed before observed how careful they were to avoid the Afghans scattered on the hillside, and he now concluded that they must be taking him to the tower of the chief, to be dealt with as he might direct, either shot at once or held by him as a hostage, for whose delivery he might obtain a handsome sum should the British again advance up the passes.

All day they travelled among the hills. At last they came upon a large village. There were no men about, doubtless all had gone to take part in the fray. The women came out

and eagerly questioned them as to the fighting on the night before.

"We know nothing," the leader said. "We believe that the last of the infidels has fallen, but we know nothing for certain."

Without pausing they took the two prisoners, whose appearance had created no surprise, as they were taken for natives, to the chief's tower, a much larger building than the abodes of most of the petty chiefs. Standing upon a crag of rock, it overlooked the village; entrance was only obtainable by a ladder leading to a door some thirty feet above the rock. Their coming had been observed. An old man stood at the door.

"So you are back, Suffyd?"

"Yes, as you see. Has the chief returned?"

"No; it is two weeks since we saw him last. He started then with all the fighting men from here and the other villages; but I expect it will not be long before he returns, for, from what we have heard, the work must be nearly done."

The party ascended the ladder, and the leader spoke a word or two with the old man, who looked greatly surprised. The captives were taken into a room, which by its furnishing was evidently one of the chief's private apartments.

"You are free to move about the house," the leader said, "but you must not leave it."

In a few minutes a woman entered, bringing a dish of boiled grain with portions of mutton in it. She gave the usual Afghan salutation. She was followed by another woman with a jug of water, two mugs, and a bottle. These were placed on a low table, and then without another word they left the room. A minute later they returned with a large earthenware dish full of burning charcoal.

"This is a good beginning, Azim," Angus said, his spirits

rising at the sight of the hot food; for although they had not been actually starved, they had been on extremely short rations when their supply of flour was exhausted, their captors being, like themselves, reduced to a handful of unground grain each day. "This does not look as if they meant to cut our throats. Evidently our Afghan is acting under orders. Those orders must have been that we were to be well treated."

They ate a hearty meal; then Angus said:

"See what there is in that bottle, Azim."

The cork had already been taken out, and Azim poured some of the liquor into a tin, and handed it to his master. The latter smelt it.

"It is Afghan spirits," he said, "the same as they sell in the bazaars in Cabul."

He filled it up with water, and drank it off.

"Now, Azim, do you do the same."

Azim, who was not a very strict Mohammedan, and had more than once tasted the forbidden drink at Cabul, needed no pressing.

"Well, master," he said, as he put the cup down, "after all this is better than lying dead and frozen down in the pass."

Angus, warmed with the good meal and by the draught that he had taken, could not disagree with his follower.

"I begin to think that you are right, Azim, though I did not believe so yesterday. It is certain that had I joined my countrymen I should have perished with them, and assuredly I have been saved from eight days of awful suffering and from death—if, indeed, we are saved from death."

"I think we can feel certain of that, master. This is not the way the Afghans treat a man whose throat they intend to cut. They certainly do not make a pillau for him, or provide him with a bottle of spirits."

"Do you know, I have been thinking, Azim," Angus said after a short silence, "that if it had been possible for Sadut Khan to know that we intended to leave camp in disguise, this might be his work again. But he could not have known it. No one but you and I, and Major Pottinger, and the three or four officers to whom I said good-bye, knew anything about it. Besides, he would have sent the men who captured us before, and who knew us by sight. And even supposing, which seems to be impossible, that this was his doing, why not have sent us here straight, instead of taking eight days to do a journey that could have been made easily in two, and forcing me to witness the awful scenes in the passes? It is all most extraordinary."

"However, there is no question, sir, that whoever our captor may be, he has been the means of saving our lives."

"There can be no doubt of that, Azim; and though I may not feel that at present, I shall in the future be very grateful to him. Even if he were to have us shot directly he comes here, I should still be grateful, for it would be a sudden death and not a lingering one, as it has been to those below. Well, it is of no use puzzling ourselves over the matter. I suppose we shall learn how it all came about when the chief, whoever he be, returns here. In the meantime we are certainly a great deal better off than we have been for the past two months in cantonments."

"That we are, master. To begin with, I am warm for the first time since the winter set in; and in the next place, I have had a good meal, and do not feel that I could grumble at anything. As to your mission, you said yourself that nothing could come of it, even if you succeeded in getting through, so that in that respect nothing has been lost by our journey being so suddenly brought to an end."

The next day some of the men who had been away with their chief returned, and the old man in charge told Angus that only one man out of all who had started from Cabul had reached Jellalabad, but that several officers had been taken as hostages, including the two generals, Major Pottinger and Captain Johnson, and two others; also, that all the ladies and children, and the ladies' husbands, had accepted the protection of Akbar.

It was a relief, indeed, to Angus to find that his friends Pottinger and Johnson had been saved, and as Captain Boyd was one of the married officers, he also must have escaped the massacre. As to the fate of Elphinstone and Shelton he was indifferent, it was to them that the misfortune that had befallen the army was largely due; but the thought that his three greatest friends had escaped gave him much pleasure. With these exceptions, that but one man out of sixteen thousand five hundred should have escaped was appalling. That the loss had been terrible he was well aware, but he was hardly prepared for the total annihilation of the force.

Another two days passed. They continued to be well fed and treated, and the women who waited upon them seemed to regard them as guests rather than as captives, talking freely with them, and only being silent when Angus endeavoured to find out the name of their chief. It was evident that on this point they had orders to keep silent. On the third day they heard a stir in the village, and shouts of acclamation and welcome. The room in which they were confined was at the back of the house, and they were therefore unable to obtain a view of what was passing.

"We shall learn our fate now, Azim," Angus said.

"I have no fear of its being a bad one, master. We cannot doubt that orders were given that we should be well treated. If we are kept prisoners till the spring, for my

part I shall not grumble if they continue to treat us as well as they have been doing."

They heard the sound of many footsteps and loud talking, then the door opened and Sadut Khan entered. He advanced with both hands outstretched to Angus.

"My dear friend," he said, "how thankful I am that you have been saved where so many have perished!"

"And so it is you, chief, to whom I owe my life?" Angus said, returning the warm grasp of Sadut's hand. "I did not thank you at first, for it seemed to me shameful that an English officer should not share in the fate of his comrades."

Sadut smiled. "But in no case would you have shared their fate. It is not from that I have saved you, but from being killed on your way down. Knowing that the passes were full of our people, I was sure that you must have been taken and murdered. No story you could have told would have availed you. You were not a Ghilzye, nor a member of any of the tribes there, and you would assuredly have been detected and killed had I not saved you."

"That is so, Sadut; and although at first I was half-mad at being unable to join my countrymen, I saw before the end came that, had I done so, my life would have been thrown away uselessly."

"Exactly; and that was why I ordered that you should be enabled to see all that passed. From what I had seen of you, I was sure that at first you would bitterly resent being taken prisoner, and that even if you knew into whose hands you had fallen you would resist; and it was for that reason that I did not this time employ Hassan and his followers to seize you, though all through your journey they kept close at hand, to use my name and authority should any party of tribesmen meet you—not that I had much fear of your detection had they done so. The men

with you had orders that in case they did meet such a party, they were to treat you both, not as captives, but as forming part of their own band. Still, it was as well that Hassan should be at hand in case of need."

"I thank you with all my heart, Sadut. I could not have done so at first, but I can do so now; you have indeed saved my life. A few days ago that seemed to me as nothing, for I felt that I was dishonoured in looking on at the massacre of my countrymen. I have had time to think it over since, and I now know that the view I took was exaggerated. Could I have joined them it was plainly my duty to have done so, but if I was a prisoner no blame could attach to me. Have you, chief, taken part in this terrible business?"

"No. With twenty of my own horsemen I rode with Akbar, who is my friend and relative, but I had no intention of drawing my sword against your people. I knew that they had been promised protection, and I thought that Akbar and his force were going to escort them. His word had been given, and I did not think he would withdraw it.

"I do not think it was his intention to do so. He could have done much more than he did, but he could not have saved the fugitives. The Nawab was alone among the Afghan chiefs in the sincerity of his assurances. Akbar had no influence with the Ghilzye chiefs, and even had he influenced them they could not have restrained their tribesmen and the Ghazees. The die was cast. It was Allah's will that those who had invaded the country without any pretext, dethroned Dost Mahomed, who had eagerly sought their alliance, and forced a man we all hated upon us, should meet their fate. Over and over again we implored Akbar, for the sake of his pledge and his word, to assist your people; even if, in his efforts to do so, he fell, then his name would go down as long as our nation existed as one who died in defence of his oath and his honour. He was all along

irresolute. At times he did his best short of attacking the Ghilzyes, at other times he held aloof altogether from the scene. At any rate, I can feel that my honour is not soiled. I was not one of those who signed the treaty, but I have done my best to prevent that treaty from being violated. Had your people sallied out from the cantonments and given us battle, I should have fought against them. But even had there been no treaty, I would not have taken part in the massacre of men who were practically defenceless, and who were in no way responsible for the crime of their government."

"I am glad to hear you say so, chief. I should have been grieved indeed had you taken part in so treacherous and terrible a massacre. But how did you learn that I was going to try to make my way down to Jellalabad? That I have never been able to understand."

"I kept a watch over you the whole time, my friend. Either Hassan, or one of his men who knew you, was always in the camp, dressed as one of the camp followers."

"But even then I cannot imagine how he could have told that I was going. I knew it myself but a few hours before I started, and only Major Pottinger and three or four of my friends were aware of it."

"My watch was a good one," the chief said, "and when two Afghans issued from your tent you may be sure the news was quickly brought to the men who had for some days been lying in readiness, and who were prepared to repeat the adventure in the city."

Suddenly, to the astonishment of Angus, Azim threw himself on his knees. "Master!" he exclaimed, "you can kill me, but I own that it was I who betrayed you. I had met Hassan in the camp, and he told me that assuredly no white man would escape alive, that it was settled that all should

be attacked and slain in the passes. He said that Sadut Khan had resolved to save you, but that to do this with certainty it would be necessary that he should be informed as to your movements, and where you would ride when the army started. He said that unless I helped them it might be impossible to save you. Then I agreed to do so, and met him or one of his men every day. As soon as you had left the tent after telling me of your expedition, I ran to the spot where I knew I should find Hassan, and told him that we were going alone. He said at once that it would be certain death were you to try to go down the pass, and that you must be carried off as soon as you had left the camp. I knew well that you would be greatly angered, and that if you suspected me you would kill me for my treachery; but that was nothing compared to your life, and so I turned traitor to you, and am willing now that you should order me to be taken out and beheaded."

Angus held out his hand to his faithful follower. "I should have been angry at first—grieved and angry too, but I cannot be angry now. You did what you believed to be best for me, and I acknowledge that it has turned out so. Your treachery was but an act of fidelity, and undoubtedly was the means of saving my life. You did wrong, but it was with the best intentions. You ought to have confided in me."

"But I knew that if I did so you would not have consented."

"That is true enough; still, I was the best judge of what was consistent with my honour. However, next to Sadut Khan I owe you my life, and it would be but poor gratitude were I to reproach you. Let us say no more about it. I shall remember always that you saved my life, and shall forget that you somewhat betrayed my trust. I have for

four years past regarded you as my friend rather than as my servant, and I shall esteem you even more so in the future."

Azim retired with tears of joy in his eyes. Sadut and Angus had a long talk together. As if by mutual consent, the subject of the late events was avoided, and the conversation was upon their journey across the Bamian and Sadut's doings since that time.

"I stayed at Khooloom until the governor, whom we had trusted implicitly, handed over Dost Mahomed's family and mine to your people. I happened to be away at the time, and on my return two days later was warned by Hassan of what had taken place. When Dost returned from captivity among the Turkomans, of course I joined him and accompanied him to Kohistan, and fought by his side in the battle of Purwandurrah. The Ameer had said no word even to me of his intention to surrender, and I was thunder-struck when I heard that he had given himself up. I remained there, and took part in the attack on the Ghoorka regiment at Charekar. After that I returned home. My fortress, as you know, lies far to the west among the Momunds. This place does not belong to me, but to the husband of a sister of mine. She is at present at my place with her husband, who is ill; and as I wished to be nearer to the scene of action, he begged me to use his fort as a residence. I desired to hold myself aloof from the negotiations, as I knew that most of the chiefs were open at any moment to betray the cause for British gold. Still, I was often down in the city, where I own the house to which you were taken. I no longer hated your people as infidels—your kindness to me showed me that there was goodness in your religion as well as in mine—but I was still ready to fight against them as the invaders of my country."

"And now, chief, what do you propose to do with me?"

"That is for you to decide, my friend. I know what you will say, but, though I may regret it deeply, I shall certainly offer no opposition. You are my guest, and it is not for me to dictate to you. I should be happy if you would stay with me till these troubles have passed, but I place myself wholly at your disposal, whatever you may decide upon."

"Thank you, indeed. It is clear to me that if it is in my power I should immediately rejoin our forces."

"I was sure that that would be your wish, and I will send you down with a strong escort to Peshawur."

"I would rather join Sale at Jellalabad."

Sadut Khan shook his head. "In that case," he said, "I shall have rescued you in vain. Sale's force is already besieged, and it will be but a repetition of Cabul. By orders of Akbar Khan, the Ghilzye chiefs have all risen. The town is practically without fortifications, though I hear that the white soldiers have been labouring hard to put the place in a state of defence. But if the army at Cabul could not withstand us, still less will Sale's force, which is only a third of its strength, hold Jellalabad."

"You forget, chief, that they are commanded by a man, and not by an utterly incapable person. They are not dispirited by forced inaction or want of food. I do not say that Jellalabad may not be taken, but I feel sure that it will offer a sturdy resistance, and the news of what has happened in the passes will only fill the soldiers with fury. At any rate, Sale's is the only force that remains of the army to which I was attached, and it is there that it is my duty, with your permission, to go. I am sure that were you in my place that would also be your decision."

"So be it," Sadut said after a long pause. "Were you to go to Peshawur you might meet your death there also, as doubtless a force will endeavour to relieve Jellalabad,

and in that case you would certainly go with them. They will never force their way through the Khyber Pass. From what I hear the Sepoys at Peshawur are almost in a state of mutiny. The Sikhs have sapped their loyalty, and have assured them that they will never be able to force the pass; and when they do move forward they cannot be depended upon to stand by the British troops so that your danger may be as great one way as another. However, Jellalabad is your choice and not mine. The citadel there is strong, and when the town is captured, as it certainly will be soon, the troops can retire there, and may hold out until they make terms and are allowed to return to India."

"I do not think they will make terms, Sadut. They have had a terrible lesson as to the manner in which treaties are respected by the greater portion of your chiefs, and are not likely to trust again to any promises, but will hold out until they have fired their last cartridge."

"They cannot hope to defend themselves," Sadut said positively. "Akbar Khan will himself head the army."

"I do not think, Sadut, that you know yet what a British soldier can do when well led. There has been no great battle fought since we entered Afghanistan, and you must not judge them by the small fights that took place round Cabul; the soldiers there had lost heart and confidence in their commander. It will be a very different thing when you meet them confident in themselves and in their leaders. Believe me, your hosts, however large, do not frighten them. You know how they have overcome many of the best fighting races in India, and that in the teeth of odds as great as can be brought against them here. I say not a word against the courage of your people, but they want discipline and training, and even a host of men fighting each for himself, cannot withstand the charge of well-disciplined soldiers."

"Why did they not come up the passes, then, to aid their friends."

"Because they were deficient in carriage, they were in a country altogether hostile to them, they had many sick, and must have left a strong force to guard them. There may have been other reasons of which I know not, but these are sufficient. For a force to enter these passes without animals to carry their food and their wounded would have been madness. And I believe that Sale has not more than twelve hundred bayonets, a force sufficient to do wonders in the plains, but which could hardly fight their way up the passes against thousands of good marksmen, as the Afghans assuredly are, armed with guns which carry much farther than their own, and firing in safety behind inaccessible rocks. But whether Jellalabad can resist all attacks, as I believe, or whether the place falls, is a matter which does not affect my resolution. It is my duty to be there, and if you will afford me means of getting there I will assuredly go."

"We will start to-morrow, then, and the sooner we are off the better. The news of what has happened in the passes will spread like flame through the country, and every fighting man will turn out to complete the work. There is a pathway from here which goes straight down to Gundamuck. I will ride with you with half a dozen of my followers; there are plenty of ponies on the hills. Certainly no questions will be asked, no suspicions can arise. When we get near Jellalabad we shall see how you can best enter. I will ride round the place with you. As I am a friend of Akbar's, it will be supposed that I am examining the place to see where an attack had best be made. There are many orchards and small villages round. When we are as near the town as we can get, you can slip from your horse as we go through an orchard. Keep under cover in the gardens until close to the

walls. When you get within musket-shot you can tie a white cloth to your gun, and you will then be safe."

This plan was carried out, and two days later, after a grateful parting from his preserver, Angus stood at the edge of the moat opposite one of the gates.

CHAPTER XVII

JELLALABAD

A SENTRY had already sent down word that two Afghans had approached carrying a white flag, and an officer appeared on the wall.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"We want to come in, Thompson. I am Angus Campbell, and have escaped almost by a miracle."

There was a shout of pleasure, and a minute later the gate was opened, and Thompson ran out and warmly shook Angus by the hand.

"I am delighted to see you," he said. "We all thought you among the slain in the passes. What an awful time it has been since we left Cabul on our way, as we believed, to India! We can scarcely believe the terrible news even now. We have learnt but little from Brydon, who was, he thought, the only survivor, except the hostages who, he tells us, were given over a few days before the end came. He was desperately wounded, and could scarce sit his horse when he arrived, and has been too ill to give us any details."

"I can give very little, for I was not with the army. I started the evening before they left camp, on a mission from Pottinger to Sir Robert Sale. Pottinger did not think that any help could possibly come, but at the same time he thought

it right to make one more effort to communicate with your general, and to tell him that they were on the point of starting. I had gone but a short distance when I was captured. Fortunately the men who took me were followers of Sadut Khan. I was taken to his fort. He was absent at the time; when he returned he at once gave me my liberty, and escorted me to within a quarter of a mile of the wall, as a return for a service I had rendered him two years ago."

"That was a piece of luck indeed. Then you saw nothing of it?"

"Yes, I saw a great deal. My captors were, I suppose, anxious to see what was going on, and we followed the course of the army, keeping on the hill; and, except for the fighting at night, I saw almost the whole of the tragedy."

While they were talking they were approaching the headquarters of the general. Angus was well known to Sir Robert, to whom he had often carried messages and notes from Burnes or Macnaghten. When their first greeting was over, he repeated the story he had told Captain Thompson. He thought it best to say no word of his escape being the result of a preconcerted plan on the part of Sadut Khan, as he felt that some might suspect that he was privy to the scheme, and had taken advantage of the friendship of the Momund chief to make his escape.

"I am not so surprised as I might otherwise have been," the general said, "since I received a letter from Pottinger yesterday. Akbar had allowed him to send it down, thinking that the information that Elphinstone, Shelton, Lawrence, Mackenzie, and Pottinger himself were all right might induce us to submit to terms. He said, 'I trust that before this you will have heard that we are about to start from Mr. Angus Campbell, who nobly accepted the desperate mission of penetrating through the passes and bringing you word of our intention. Should he have arrived safely, I beg to

recommend him most strongly to the authorities for accepting the mission, which seemed almost a hopeless one. He has rendered great service during the time the troops have been in cantonments, by aiding the commissariat officers in bringing in grain.' As you had not arrived we naturally feared that you had been murdered on your way down. I am glad indeed that you have escaped. You will now, of course, give your assistance to Macgregor, our political officer."

"If he cannot utilize my services, sir, and he can have but little political work to do now, I shall be glad if you will attach me to one of the regiments where you think I may be most useful."

"You had better talk it over with Macgregor first. You know him, of course; and if he does not want you, I will attach you to my own staff. With your knowledge of the Afghan language, your services might be invaluable in obtaining information; or, should we make a sortie—and we have already made one with effect—I should be glad, if you wish it, to attach you either to the infantry or cavalry, whichever you prefer. Now that you have told us about yourself, please give us any details you can of what you saw of the fighting?"

"It can hardly be said that there was any fighting, sir; until the last day the troops were so completely surrounded, and I may say overwhelmed by the camp followers, that they were practically unable to use their arms. General Shelton with the rear-guard fought nobly, and covered the retreat into Jugduluk, until the time when he was enticed with the general into Akbar's camp, and there held as a hostage. By what I heard, the handful of men left, only about a hundred and fifty all told, fought desperately to break their way through a barricade with which the Afghans had blocked the top of the pass. Only ten officers succeeded in breaking

through, and of these all but one were killed on the road. All the soldiers died fighting at the barricade, and many officers. The last Sepoy had fallen two days before."

"It has been a bad business," General Sale said, "bad not only in its terrible result, but in the manner in which affairs were conducted. We here received with astonishment the news that four thousand five hundred British troops were cooped up by a horde of Afghans without one single attempt being made to bring on a battle in the open. Officers and men alike were astounded when Pottinger's first letter arrived, saying that negotiations were continued after the murder of Macnaghten. However, all this is a matter for future investigation. And now a personal question. Can you tell me how it was that my wife, Lady Macnaghten, and the other ladies, escaped uninjured? I only know from Pottinger that the ladies and children were handed over to the protection of Akbar, and that those who had husbands were also accompanied by them."

"The ladies were always kept close behind the advanced guard, sir. As these showed an unbroken front, the Afghans allowed them to pass without opposition, falling upon the confused mass behind them."

"Do you think that Akbar was a sharer in this treacherous attack?"

"I think his conduct was doubtful in the extreme, sir. He certainly did try more than once to persuade the Ghilyze chiefs to allow the survivors to pass on unmolested, but by that time the passions of the Afghans were absolutely beyond control. I myself have great doubts whether he would have interfered had he not been well aware that his interference would be useless. But this is only my opinion, based upon the facts, that in the first place he himself shot Macnaghten, whom he had invited to a conference; in the second place, he took no step whatever to carry out the condition

to supply baggage animals and provisions; and lastly, because I know that long before the column set out on its march, he sent out orders to the Ghilzye chiefs to attack you."

"The case certainly looks very black against him," the general said; "but at least we may hope that, as his family are in our hands in India, he will protect the hostages."

"I hope, sir, that he will hand them over to the Nawab, who appears to me to be a thoroughly honest man. Undoubtedly he did his best to persuade the chiefs to agree to the treaty with us. He certainly did send in some provisions to the camp, and generally we formed a high opinion of his kindness of heart. Your fortifications are stronger than I expected to find them, from what I have heard, sir."

"Yes, the men have worked incessantly at them ever since we came here. The mud walls can scarcely be said to have existed when we marched in. There was no parapet, the ditch was filled in with rubbish, and the walls had so crumbled away that carts could cross over them at almost every point. Fortunately the men were in good heart, and all, Europeans and Sepoys, have worked with an energy beyond praise. The moat has been cleared out and filled with water, the walls have been scarped, and a parapet twelve feet high erected. The bastions have been put in order; and though, had we been seriously attacked at first, we must have retired to the citadel, we are now ready to withstand any assault."

Angus next went to Macgregor, who received him most warmly.

"I am glad indeed to see you, Campbell. Pottinger mentioned you in his reports as doing invaluable service with Boyd and Johnson. You will not find much in our line here. When the sword is once drawn, there is nothing for us to do until it becomes a question of our dictating terms, a contingency not likely to arise for some time."

"Had you hard fighting to get here?" Angus asked.

"No fighting at all. As we marched down from Gundamuck, the natives all supposed that we were on our way to Peshawur, and when we suddenly turned and marched towards the city, it was too late for them to think of resistance, and they simply bolted on one side of the town as we marched in on the other. We were bitterly disappointed when we saw the state of the walls, and it was a question for some time whether we should not content ourselves with holding the citadel only. But it was at last determined, for a time at least, to hold the town, as our retirement to the citadel would look like weakness. Another consideration was, that once in the citadel we should be shut up entirely, for, as you see, it stands in the middle of the town, and with the streets crowded with the enemy, there would be no getting out to obtain provisions.

"The result has proved the wisdom of the step we took. The walls are now strong enough to be obstinately defended, and from their extent we have been able to sally out at one gate or another and bring in provisions. We had but two days' food when we arrived here; now we have succeeded in gathering in a sufficient quantity to keep the troops on half rations for two months, and I hope that before it is finished we shall be relieved from Peshawur. We gave the natives a handsome thrashing on the day before we got in here. They attacked us in great force, trying especially to carry off our baggage, but the infantry repulsed them splendidly. However, they came on to renew the attack. The cavalry were placed in ambush, and the troops, after at first advancing, suddenly wheeled round and went off at the double. The enemy, believing that they had achieved a great victory, rushed after them. As soon as they reached an open space, the cavalry fell upon them. For months they had been inactive, being of no use among the hills. Now was their

chance, and in a moment they were in the thick of the Afghans. They made terrible havoc among them, and thus it was that we were able to enter the town without further trouble. The next day, the 13th of November, Broadfoot was appointed garrison engineer. He had a small corps of sappers with him, and they soon set to work.

"On the morning of the 16th, the enemy were thick in the gardens round the town, the principal body being on the hillside. It was resolved to give them another lesson. They were, as could be seen from the highest point in the city, some five thousand strong, and Colonel Monteith of the 35th Bengal Infantry, took out eleven hundred men at daybreak. The advance was covered by the guns which had been mounted on the walls, and their shrapnel soon drove the enemy into the open. The infantry pressed forward and scattered them, and the cavalry completed their rout. It was this defeat that so cowed them for a time, that I was able to fetch in grain, sheep, firewood, and other necessaries. I may mention that I took upon myself, as soon as we came in here, the post of commissariat officer. It was not until the end of the month that they again mustered in force sufficient to attack us; they contented themselves with hovering round and keeping up a desultory fire.

"On the 1st of December, however, they gathered in great numbers, and seemed to threaten an attack. Colonel Dennie commanded this time, and he took out the greater portion of the garrison and a couple of guns. It was noon when he sallied out. Abbot's guns commenced the action by pouring a tremendous fire of grape into the thick mass. They fled in wild confusion; the cavalry cut them up terribly, and the infantry overtook and bayoneted many of them. It could scarcely be called a fight. The day was won directly the guns opened fire, and we did not lose a single man. Since that time they have not ventured to attack us.

"News came day after day of the terrible mess at Cabul. The news was kept as far as possible from the troops, so as not to discourage them; but, of course, since Brydon came in, the truth of the terrible massacre had to be told. I am happy to say that, although filling them with wrath and indignation, it has in no way abated their spirit. During the six weeks' rest we have had since the battle of the 1st of December, we have, as you see, really done wonders in the way of fortification, and consider that we are in a position to repulse any attack however formidable."

"When do you expect that a relief column will arrive from Peshawur?"

"That is a grave question which I cannot answer. Our last news was that Brigadier-general Wyld was on the point of advancing, but from the tone in which he wrote he had evidently no great hope of success. His four Sepoy regiments had been corrupted by the Sikhs, who, having themselves a great repugnance to enter the passes, had endeavoured, and successfully, to inspire the Sepoys with the same feeling. The Sikhs, who were to co-operate with him, were themselves in a state of open mutiny, and threatened to kill General Avitable if he interfered with them. He intended, however, to advance, as the case was so urgent, but with little hope of success. He was without cavalry, and had but two guns on Sikh carriages, which would probably break down after a few rounds had been fired. It was the letter of a brave man surrounded with difficulties, but ready to attempt almost the impossible to bring aid to us. I fear, however, that there is little chance of our relief until reinforcements from India reach Peshawur."

This opinion was justified when, on the 28th, news was brought that the movement had failed. On the 15th Colonel Moseley had started under cover of night with the 53rd and 64th native regiments to occupy the fortress of Ali Musjid,

which had been held by a small corps of men of one of the native tribes under Mr. Mackeson. They had been true to their salt, and had resisted every attack of the Afridis. Moseley's force arrived there at daybreak, and met with but little opposition on the way. But it was discovered that, owing to some blunder, only fifty supply bullocks had been sent on instead of three hundred and fifty that should have accompanied the force. Therefore, instead of having a month's provisions, they had but enough for a few days. Brigadier Wyld started on the morning of the 19th to relieve them, but on the preceding day the Sikh troops refused to enter the pass and marched back to Peshawur. Nevertheless, Wyld determined to press forward with the two native regiments. As soon, however, as the enemy attacked them the Sepoys at the head of the column wavered and opened an aimless fire.

In vain the Brigadier and the officers endeavoured to persuade them to advance. They would not move forward, nor would the rest of the troops advance to their assistance. The two guns broke down after a round or two, and what little spirit remained among the Sepoys evaporated at once, and the column had to fall back. One of the guns was spiked and left behind, the Sepoys refusing to make any effort to bring it off. The Brigadier, who with several of our officers was wounded, saw that it was impossible to persevere, and the force fell back beyond the pass. Moseley could obtain no news, and was unaware of the repulse of the relieving column. Although the troops were on half rations supplies were nearly exhausted. The water was bad, and numbers of the Sepoys fell ill, and on the 23rd he determined to evacuate the fortress. Two officers volunteered to hold it, but the Sepoys would not support them, and the former native garrison had lost heart; so, on the 24th, the force marched out. The Afridis mustered strongly to oppose the retreat. The Sepoys,

animated now by the hope of safety, fought well. Two British officers were killed, most of the baggage lost, and some of the sick and wounded had to be abandoned, but the main body got through safely.

Such was the news that was brought by a native in our pay, together with a letter from Brigadier Wyld saying that it would be impossible to renew the attempt until reinforcements of at least one British regiment with some guns arrived. But the news that help was still far distant in no way discouraged the garrison of Jellalabad, who redoubled their efforts to strengthen the fortifications and to prepare by their own unaided efforts for the worst.

At Peshawur Wyld's repulse bore the natural consequences. The discontent among the Sepoy's increased, many deserted, and expressions of determination never to enter the pass again were common among them. Sickness broke out, and when on the 25th of February General Pollock, who had been selected to command the force gathered there, and invested with full authority on all other matters, arrived, he found a thousand men in hospital; a week later the number was increased to eighteen hundred.

No better man than Pollock could have been chosen. He possessed at once great firmness, kindness of heart, and a manner calculated to inspire confidence. He declared to the central authorities at once that, even with the brigade which had come up with him, to advance up the pass would be to court another defeat. The four Sepoy regiments that had been engaged could, in their present state, not be counted on for service, and the force at his disposal was therefore no greater than that which Wyld had lost. He set to work in the first place to restore confidence. It was a difficult task. Many even among the officers had become affected with the spirit of defection, and did not hesitate to express their opinion that an advance through the Khyber Pass would

involve a repetition of the Cabul disaster. The new Sepoy regiments were at once visited by emissaries from those of Wyld's brigade and from the Sikhs, who endeavoured in every way to persuade them also to refuse to enter the pass, and succeeded in the case of the 26th native regiment, who joined the four other battalions in refusing to advance. On the day after his arrival General Pollock visited all the hospitals, enquired into the ailments of the sick, and talked encouragingly to them. Then he went to the Sepoy regiments, enquired into the cause of their discontent, and exhorted them to return to their duty, and not to bring disgrace upon regiments that had so many times in the past proved their courage and loyalty.

His task was a hard and difficult one, but his method of mildness and firmness combined gradually restored their spirits and discipline; and the knowledge that reinforcements were on their way, with a good proportion of European troops, including cavalry and artillery, greatly aided his efforts. Still, until these reinforcements arrived, Pollock could do nothing but reply to the urgent letters of Sale and Macgregor by pointing out his inability to move.

On the 19th of February Angus was with Macgregor on the walls of Jellalabad. The men were as usual working hard and steadily, grateful in the thought that their long labour had borne its fruits, and that in a few days they would be able to lay by their picks and shovels, the work that they had been set to do having been accomplished.

"Another week," Captain Havelock, who was acting as Persian interpreter to Macgregor, said to Angus, "and the whole work which Broadfoot traced out will be finished. In one respect I am sorry that it should be so, for there is nothing like active work for keeping men's spirits up and preventing them from feeling the effects of idleness. I think—" and he stopped abruptly. There was a sudden

tremor of the earth and a deep sound like thunder, then they were both thrown off their feet. The walls, the houses, the whole city, swayed and shook. Then came the crash of falling houses, wild shouts of alarm and pain; the earth crumbled beneath them, and they rolled down together into the moat. On finding that they were unhurt they scrambled up the slope of earth. A terrible sight presented itself. A third of the buildings in the town had fallen. But this was not the worst. Several of the bastions had been destroyed; almost all the parapets were thrown down; several great breaches were made in the wall, one of them eighty feet in length; and the moat had in many places been filled up with the debris of the wall and parapet. The soldiers were extricating themselves or helping their comrades from the earth that had almost overwhelmed them; others were standing gazing with a dazed air at the destruction that had been wrought.

"We had better go to head-quarters," Havelock said, "and see what has happened there."

They made their way with difficulty through the ruins that blocked the streets. The movements of the earth still continued, and they had all they could do to keep their feet. On reaching head-quarters they found to their satisfaction that all was safe. The general and Macgregor had both been occupied in writing despatches to Peshawur, and had rushed out into the little courtyard of the house. The offices round it fell in ruins at their feet, but the dwelling-house, although it swayed to and fro, did not fall. Enquiries were at once set on foot, when it was found that no lives had been lost among the garrison, although two natives had been killed by the fall of their houses.

No time was lost. The whole of the garrison were told off into working parties, and in half an hour were diligently at work repairing the wall at the most important points.

They worked until late at night, by which time the breaches were scarped, the rubbish all cleared away, and the ditches dug out again, while a parapet of gabions was erected along the great breach. A parapet was erected on the remains of the bastion which flanked the approach to the Cabul gate, that had been entirely ruined, a trench had been dug, and a temporary parapet raised on every bastion round the place. Never, probably, was so much work accomplished by an equal number of men in the same time. Day after day the work was continued, until by the end of the month the parapets were restored, the breaches built up, the rampart increased in thickness, every battery re-established, and the gates entrenched; and yet the troops were in hourly anxiety that their work might be again destroyed, for during the month succeeding the great earthquake fully a hundred shocks were felt.

So extraordinary was the vigour with which the repairs had been accomplished, that when Akbar Khan moved down with his forces early in March and saw the formidable defences, he and his followers were unable to understand it, and declared that the preservation of Jellalabad from destruction must have been the result of witchcraft, for no other town or village had escaped. While at work the garrison had been in constant expectation of attack, for Akbar's army lay but a few miles from the town. But the success of the two sorties had shown the Afghan leader that he had very different foes to deal with from the dispirited force that had been annihilated in the passes. Here were men ready to work and to fight, while those at Cabul had done neither; and he resolved to attempt to starve them out, hoping for the same success as had attended a similar step at Cabul. He kept on, therefore, drawing in more closely, harassing the foraging parties, and having occasional skir-

mishes with the bodies of cavalry sent out to protect the grass-cutters.

On the night of the 10th the enemy threw up sangars, small defences of earth or stone, at many points round the town, and from behind them opened a brisk fire. There was a report that behind these shelters they were mining towards the walls, and a strong party of infantry and cavalry, with two hundred of Broadfoot's sappers, commanded by Colonel Dennie, were sent out. As they poured out through the gate, Akbar advanced with his forces; but the guns on the ramparts received them with a heavy fire, and although they came on several times as if prepared to give battle, they eventually drew back, unable to withstand the storm of shot and shrapnel. The working parties of sappers set to work to destroy the sangars, and in doing so discovered that there was no foundation for the report that the enemy were mining. When the work was done, the troops began to fall back to the town, as ammunition was beginning to run short. On seeing their retirement the Afghans again advanced; but on our troops halting and facing them, they at once turned and fled, having lost considerably by our artillery and musketry fire. Dennie's force sustained no loss in killed, but Broadfoot was wounded, and the loss of his services as engineer was serious.

Time passed quietly. The whole of the ground had been cleared of trees, houses, and walls for some distance round the town, and the Afghans were no longer able to crawl up under shelter and keep up a galling fire on our men. Early in April a messenger brought in news that Pollock had now received his reinforcements, and would advance in a day or two, the Sepoys having recovered their health and spirits. His force had been joined by the 9th Foot, the 3rd Dragoons, nine guns, and the 1st Native Cavalry.

On the 5th these started from Jumrood. Brigadier Wyld commanded the advance guard, General M'Caskill the rear. Two columns of infantry were to scale the height on either side of the pass, Major Davis in command of that on the right, Colonel Moseley of that on the left. At three o'clock in the morning they started. The heights on either side and the pass were crowded with the enemy, who were always well informed of the British movements by the natives in the town. They expected that the force would all move along the road, and anticipated an easy success. The two flanking parties moved off so quietly in the dim light of the morning that they were not perceived by the enemy until they began to scale the heights. Then a lively combat began, and the Afghans learned for the first time that even among their own hills the British could beat them.

The difficulties of the ascent were great, but the *moral* of the Sepoys was now completely restored, and they stormed the heights on either side with great gallantry, driving the Afghans before them. While this was going on, the main column in the valley had cleared away a formidable barricade that had been erected at the mouth of the pass, and which could not have been destroyed without much loss had the Afghans maintained their position on the hills. Pollock now advanced, and the Afghans, who had assembled in large numbers at the mouth of the pass, bewildered at finding themselves outflanked, fell back, and the column with its great convoy of animals moved forward.

The number of draught animals was very large, although the baggage of the advancing force had been cut down to the narrowest dimensions, in order that provisions and ammunition for the garrison at Jellalabad might be taken on. The march occupied the greater part of the day. The heat was great, and the troops suffered from thirst; but animated by their success, they thought little of this, and before night-

fall bivouacked round Ali Musjid, whose garrison had evacuated the place when they saw that the day had gone against them. All night long the Afghans kept up a fire from among the hills, but did not attempt an attack. The Sikhs had joined the main body, as the general, doubtful as to their fidelity, had sent them by another pass. The general's estimate of them was not a mistaken one. They were left to occupy Ali Musjid and guard the pass, but shortly after the army had moved on they quitted the position and marched away, seizing some of the baggage animals on their way up, and, throwing their loads on the ground, employing them to carry their own baggage.

The crushing and altogether unexpected defeat that the tribesmen had suffered had its effect. They had found themselves beaten at their own game and withdrew at once to their fastnesses, and Pollock's force marched on without meeting with any serious opposition.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ADVANCE ON CABUL

THE garrison of Jellalabad found themselves pressed for provisions at the end of March, and on the 1st of April made a gallant sortie, and swept into the town a flock of five hundred sheep and goats. On the 5th Macgregor's spies brought in news from Akbar's camp that it was reported there that Pollock had been beaten with great loss in the Khyber Pass, and on the following morning Akbar's guns fired a royal salute in honour of the supposed victory. Sale, now confident of the fighting powers of his men, determined to make a great effort to break up the blockade; as if Pollock

had really been defeated it would be some time before relief could come to them, and they could not hope again to make such a capture as that which they had effected on the 1st. A council of war was held, and action was decided upon, as success would not only free them from all apprehensions of being starved out, but would effect a diversion in favour of Pollock.

The force was but a small one for the enterprise which they moved out to undertake. The centre column, consisting of the 13th Regiment, mustering five hundred bayonets, was under the command of Colonel Dennie; the right, consisting of some three hundred and fifty men of the two native regiments and a detachment of sappers, was commanded by Captain Havelock; the left column was about the same strength, under Lieutenant-colonel Monteith; the light field battery and a small cavalry force were to support them. They advanced from the city at daylight on the 7th. Akbar Khan drew up his force, six thousand strong, before his camp, his right resting on a fort, and his left on the Cabul river. Havelock's column commenced the fight by attacking the enemy's left, while Dennie advanced to the assault of the fort, which was vigorously defended. Dennie himself fell mortally wounded by an Afghan ball, but his men captured the place in gallant style. A general attack now took place on Akbar's camp. The artillery advanced at a gallop, and poured their fire into the Afghan centre, the 13th and Colonel Monteith's column pierced their right, while Havelock drove back their left from the support afforded by the river.

The Afghans fought sturdily, their musketry keeping up a heavy fire, and large bodies of horse again and again threatened Havelock's column, while three guns from a hidden battery opened fire. The struggle, however, was a short one. Their cannon were taken, every position held by them was captured, and by seven o'clock they were in full

retreat. Two cavalry standards were taken, four guns lost by the Cabul and Gundamuck forces were recaptured, a vast quantity of ordnance stores destroyed, and the whole of the enemy's tents burnt. The loss of the Afghans had been heavy, and several chiefs were among the fallen. The loss of the victors was small indeed. Colonel Dennie and ten Sepoys were killed, three officers and some fifty men wounded. A day or two later Pollock's force reached Jellalabad, and the joy of both parties was great.

Indeed, no stronger contrast can be found than that between the leading and conduct of the force at Cabul and that at Jellalabad. The one showed the British leader and the British soldier at their worst, the other the British commander and men at their best. It may be confidently affirmed that had Sale been in the place of Elphinstone, with full power of action, the fight in the passes would never have taken place, and within three days of the murder of Burnes the Afghan host would have been a mob of fugitives, and Cabul would have been in our hands. The British soldier is always best in the attack. He is ready and eager to fight against any odds, but when kept in a state of inaction, under a commander in whom he has lost all confidence, he speedily deteriorates. Happily there are few examples in our military history such as those of Cabul and Walcheren, where the British soldier has been placed in such a position.

While Pollock was forcing the Khyber Pass the reign of Shah Soojah came to a sudden end. After the departure of the British no hostility was shown towards him by the Afghans, and he continued at the Bala Hissar in the position of nominal sovereign of Afghanistan the Nawab having willingly resigned the difficult and dangerous post and accepted that of wuzeer. He himself had his troubles. Most restless and dangerous of these Afghan leaders was Aneen-oollah-Khan, who had played fast and loose with the British while

secretly working against them. He demanded the surrender to him of the hostages. The Nawab steadily refused, and as threats of force were used against him, raised a body of three thousand men for their protection. These, however, were corrupted by Aneen, but the Nawab remained faithful to his trust. On the 4th of April Shah Soojah left the Bala Hissar with his retinue to go down to join Akbar Khan. An ambush was laid for him by one of the sons of the Nawab. These poured in a volley, and Shah Soojah fell dead, shot through the head. The Nawab was filled with horror at the deed, and swore an oath never again to see his son beneath his roof or suffer him to be named in his presence.

While Jellalabad was being besieged, the situation at Candahar had been precarious. Ghuznee had been captured by the tribesmen after a gallant defence, and its garrison had been massacred. Kelat-i-Ghilzye was besieged, and without hope of succour. Candahar was surrounded by the insurgent Dooranees, but these had been twice defeated by General Nott. During one of these expeditions the city was in imminent danger, for the enemy, gradually retiring, drew the sortie-party a considerable distance from the walls, and then at night slipped away and attacked the place. One of the gates was destroyed by fire, and for many hours the issue of the contest was doubtful. At last, however, the assailants were beaten off with very heavy loss. A force marching up to the relief of the town, under General England, being very badly handled, were opposed on their way up from Quettah, and fell back and remained there until Nott sent a peremptory order for them to advance again.

He himself marched to meet them, and on the united force arriving at Candahar, the town was placed beyond all risk of capture. Nott was preparing to march on Cabul,

while Pollock advanced on Jellalabad; but, to the stupefaction and disappointment of all, an order arrived from Calcutta for the abandonment of Candahar and the return of the force to India. There had been a change of governors. Lord Ellenborough had succeeded Lord Auckland, and immediately set to work to overthrow the whole policy of his predecessor. Similar orders were sent to Pollock. The latter, however, mindful of the honour of his country, and the safety of the hostages and ladies, replied that, being almost without carriage, it would be impossible for him to retire at once, thus gaining time, which he utilized by entering into negotiations with Akbar Khan for the release of their prisoners.

Both generals wisely kept the order they had received a secret from the troops, who would have been profoundly disheartened. However, no secret had been made as to the orders issued in Calcutta, and the news soon spread all over India, and reached Pollock's camp, that the army was to be withdrawn. Pollock did his best to throw doubts upon the truth of the reports by marking out a new camp two miles in advance, and arranging with the natives to bring in supplies there, so as to give grounds for a belief that, so far from leaving the town, he was preparing for an advance. In the meantime he had written an urgent letter pointing out the evils and difficulties of an immediate withdrawal, and the immense advantage that would arise by striking a heavy blow before retiring, and so to some extent retrieving the reputation of the British army.

The letter had its influence, and the governor wrote:

It would be desirable undoubtedly, before finally quitting Afghanistan, that you should have an opportunity of striking a blow at the enemy, and since circumstances seem to com-

pel you to remain there till October, the governor-general earnestly hopes that you will be able to draw the enemy into a position in which you may strike such a blow effectually.

This was good news. Every effort was being made to collect carriage cattle in Hindostan for the purpose of the withdrawal, and Pollock determined to turn these to account. If there was carriage enough to enable him to fall back upon Peshawur, there would be carriage enough for him to advance on Cabul. In the meantime negotiations were going on for the release of the captives. The married families had, on the day of their arrival at Akbar's camp, been placed in a small fort with Pottinger, Lawrence, and Mackenzie. Two days later they were taken down to Jugduluk, where they found General Elphinstone, Brigadier Shelton, and Captain Johnson, and thence travelled down to a fort, the property of the father of Akbar's wife. The party consisted of nine ladies, twenty officers and fourteen children; seventeen European soldiers, two women and a child were confined in another part of the fort.

Here they remained three months. Two more officers were brought in, and a month after their arrival two other survivors, Major Griffiths and Captain Souter, were added to the party. On the day after Akbar's defeat they were hastily taken away and carried to Tezeen, and thence to a place called Zanda, far up in the hills. General Elphinstone had been bed-ridden for some weeks, and was left behind at Tezeen, where he died. Akbar Khan sent in his remains to Jellalabad. Civil war was raging in Cabul. Shah Soojah's second son had succeeded him, but he was altogether without power. Some of the chiefs supported him, others opposed; but finally the Bala Hissar was stormed by Akbar, who was now the most powerful chief in Afghanistan. Pollock was still harassed by letters from Lord Ellenborough insisting

upon his retiring; but public opinion throughout India was so opposed to a course that would bring the deepest disgrace upon the British power, that at last, in August, he wrote to Nott saying that he must withdraw his force from Afghanistan, but that if he chose he might take the route through Ghuznee and Cabul. He similarly issued his orders for Pollock to retire, but added that "you will be at liberty to first march to Cabul to meet Nott."

Both had been preparing for the movement. Pollock had sent several expeditions against hostile tribesmen, and had recovered one of the captured guns. On the 20th of August he left Jellalabad with eight thousand troops, and on the 23rd reached Gundamuck. The next day the village was cleared of a strong body of the enemy. While concentrating his troops there and waiting intelligence from Nott, the British force remained at Gundamuck till the 7th of September. On the 1st, Futteh Jung, who had succeeded his father, rode into camp. Akbar Khan had stripped him of all power and all his wealth, and imprisoned him in the Bala Hissar, from which he had now escaped, and with much difficulty made his way to Pollock's camp to seek the protection of the British government. On the 7th the first division of the army, under the command of Sale, moved forward; the second division, under General M'Caskill, marched on the following day. Sale found the hills commanding the roads through the Jugduluk Pass occupied by large bodies of the enemy, who opened a heavy fire. The guns replied, and the infantry then in three columns dashed up the hills and drove the Ghilzyes from them.

One strong body had taken refuge at an apparently inaccessible point, but the British storming party scaled the height, and the enemy fled without waiting for the assault at close quarters. Thus on the hills where the Afghans had massacred Elphinstone's troops they were now taught that,

if well led, the British soldier could defeat them in a position they had deemed impregnable. At Tezeen the second division joined the first. The force halted for a day, and the Afghans, believing that this betokened indecision, mustered their forces for a final engagement. Akbar had, as he had threatened to do if they advanced, sent off the captives to the Bamian Pass, with the intention of selling them as slaves to the Turkomans.

On the 13th the two armies were face to face. The valley of Tezeen was commanded on all sides by lofty hills, and these now swarmed with men. The enemy's horse entered the valley, but the British squadrons charged them, drove them in headlong flight, and cut down many. The infantry climbed the hills on both sides under a terrible fire from the Afghan guns. To these they made no reply, well knowing that their muskets were no match for the long firearms of the enemy. As soon, however, as they reached the summit, they fixed bayonets and charged with a mighty cheer. Only a few of the enemy stood their ground, and fell, the rest fled. All day firing was kept up, until at last the enemy occupying the highest ridges were, in spite of a sturdy resistance, driven off, fairly beaten on their own ground and in their own style of warfare.

Our troops fought with extraordinary bravery. They were animated by a desire to wipe out the disgrace that had fallen on our arms, and were maddened by the sight of the numerous skeletons of their comrades in the Jugduluk. Akbar Khan saw that all was up, and fled, while the tribesmen scattered to their homes, and the army marched forward without opposition to Cabul.

In the meantime, Nott had been busy. On the 29th of May he inflicted a decisive defeat upon the Dooranees outside the walls of Candahar. On the 7th of August the army evacuated that city, and on the 27th arrived at Mookoor.

Up to this point no opposition whatever had been offered. The inhabitants had been friendly, and supplies were obtained without difficulty. But the Afghan governor of Ghuznee had raised all the country, and had taken up a very strong position near the source of the Turnuck.

On the 28th the forces met. The position of the enemy was unknown, as a thick mist covered the country. The cavalry rode forward to reconnoitre, cut up a party of Afghan infantry in the plain, and pursuing them hotly came upon hills crowded by the enemy, who opened a heavy fire. They fell back in an orderly manner, when a body of the enemy's horse appeared on the hill above them. A squadron of native cavalry charged them, but were cut up by the fire of a body of Afghan foot who had hitherto been hidden. The enemy's horse poured down, and the troopers, already suffering from the infantry fire, turned and fled. The panic spread, and the whole of the cavalry were soon in flight. Two British officers had been killed and three wounded, and fifty-six men disabled. Nott, on hearing the loss, marched out with his infantry, but on reaching the scene of the fight found that the enemy had retired.

On the afternoon of the next day Nott, marching forward, came upon a fort held by the enemy. Our artillery opened upon it with little effect. The Afghan army, some ten thousand strong, had been watching us, and now opened an artillery fire from the heights, and its foot men moved forward to the attack; but as they neared us our infantry charged with a cheer and they broke and fled. Two of their guns, and their tents, magazines, and stores were captured. On the 5th of September Nott encamped before Ghuznee, and began to prepare for the assault. The enemy, however, were in no humour for fighting; the greater portion of the tribesmen had scattered to their homes after their defeat. The garrison lost heart altogether and evacuated the city,

and the governor set off with a few followers for Cabul. The next morning the British entered the town without firing a shot. On the following day, however, the governor returned with a large number of the tribesmen who had just arrived, and on the 14th Nott attacked them. A hard battle was fought, but it was indecisive. On the following morning the enemy disappeared; they had received the news of the defeat of Akbar at Tezeen. The column, however, was again harassed when the troops advanced, but they cleared the way in good style. The tribesmen here had been actively engaged in the Cabul insurrection, and twenty-six of their forts were burned as punishment. On the 17th the army encamped four miles from the city, and learned that Pollock had occupied Cabul two days previously.

Angus Campbell had taken no part in the operations of that advance. On the 26th of August news had arrived at Gundamuck by a messenger from the moonshee, Mohun Lal, who had throughout kept the force at Jellalabad well supplied with news of what was passing at Cabul; he now sent to say that on the previous day Akbar had despatched all the captives under an escort of three hundred horse to Bamian, and that they were to be taken on to Khooloom, and there handed over to the governor. Once there, it was certain that they would remain in captivity among the tribes until death released them. As soon as he heard the news Angus went to Macgregor.

"I am going to ask," he said, "if you will allow me to go on an expedition on my own account. I was thinking that it was just possible that the captives might be overtaken. It is probable that they will halt some time at Bamian, and certainly we could come up to them there. With so many women and children it will be impossible for the convoy to move fast, and they may stay at Bamian until the result of our operations here are known. You

have already promised me that the part taken by Sadut Khan shall be forgiven, seeing that he did his best to persuade Akbar to give protection to the retreating army, and also because he showed great kindness to me when I was in his hands. If you can obtain permission from the general I will start at once in disguise for his fort in the mountain. I cannot but think that he will aid me, and I might, with four of his followers, who have come from Bamian, and are personally well known to me, succeed in some way in rescuing at least a few of the captives. Eldred Pottinger, Captain Boyd, and Captain Johnson are all dear friends of mine, and I would willingly run any risk in the endeavour to save them. Possibly, if we overtake the party, we may in some way cause a delay which would enable any rescue party sent off when you reach Cabul to get up in time."

"It is a brave offer, Campbell, but the enterprise seems to me an almost desperate one. However, I don't think that I should be justified in refusing it, and I am sure that if anyone could succeed, you will do so. When will you start?"

"In ten minutes, sir, if you will furnish me with an authority to offer a bribe to the officer in command of their escort."

"I will go and see the general at once. He is well aware, from the report that I have made, of the kindness Sadut showed you, and of his efforts to save our army. I have no doubt that the chief has fought against us in the last battle, but that was only natural. I feel sure that above all things Pollock would embrace any offer that promises the slightest chance of rescuing the hostages, but the risk would be terrible, Campbell."

"Of course there would be risk," Angus agreed, "but I do not see how it would be exceptionally great. I have

journeyed as an Afghan two or three times already without detection, and I could just as well do so again. At any rate, I am willing to undertake the enterprise. It would, of course, be useful for me to take a considerable sum of money to win over the guard; still more useful if the general would authorize me to offer terms that would tempt the cupidity of the commander, as we have always found that the Afghans are ready to do almost anything for bribes."

"I will take you at once with me to the general. He is well acquainted with the services you rendered Pottinger at Herat, and have rendered the army ever since it began its march from the Indus, and he knows the favourable report that has been sent in by Pottinger and Burnes."

Angus had, indeed, been introduced by Sir Robert Sale to General Pollock on his arrival at Cabul. On reaching his tent they found him for the moment unoccupied. He listened gravely to Macgregor's statement of the offer that Angus had made.

"It is a noble proposal, Mr. Campbell," he said, in his usual kindly and courteous way, "but the risk seems to me terrible, and should anything happen to you, the service would be deprived of one of its most promising and meritorious officers. At the same time, there seems a fair possibility that you may succeed in rescuing one or more of the captives. Of course it would be quite out of the question that any of the ladies could escape. There would be a hot pursuit, and only horsemen well mounted could hope to get off. However, I do not feel justified in refusing any offer that affords a shadow of hope of saving such men as Pottinger, and will do all that Mr. Macgregor suggests to facilitate your operations. You will doubtless pass through Cabul, and I will at once write a letter to Mohun Lal, requesting him to give you authority, in his name as

well as mine, for payment to the leader of the prisoners' escort of any sum in reason. At present native opinion is strong that we shall not be able to force the passes, and the name of the moonshee may have greater effect than any promise on my part; but at the same time, until you can get into communication with the captives and learn something of the officer and his disposition, it would be madness to attempt to bribe him. The difficulties of the journey appear to me to be great, but not insuperable. The real difficulty will only begin when you overtake the captives' escort."

"I feel that, sir, but I rely greatly upon the men I hope to obtain from Sadut. Although not of his tribe, they have attached themselves most strongly to him. They are strong, resolute men, and as one of them was a petty chief near Bamian, he may be able to gather a few others to aid me. I shall, of course, be very glad to have authority to offer a bribe to the officer in command of the party, but I rely chiefly upon these men and my own efforts, at any rate as far as Pottinger is concerned. Captains Boyd and Johnson can hardly leave their families. Possibly, by the aid of these men, I may be able to collect a sufficient number of fighting men to make a sudden attack upon the escort, and to carry off all the captives to some hiding-place among the hills, and there keep them until you send on a force to bring them in. Of course I must be entirely guided by circumstances, but it is impossible for me to have any fixed plan until I see how matters stand."

"I can quite see that, Mr. Campbell, and that, greatly as you may desire to rescue the whole party, it is Eldred Pottinger who is the first object of your expedition."

"That is so, colonel. He was most kind to me in Herat, and it is to him I owe my present position; therefore he is my first object. If I can free him it will be a great step

gained towards rescuing the others. I feel sure that he would not think for a moment of leaving his companions to their fate. But his name as the defender of Herat is known to every Afghan, and he would be able to bring a great influence to bear upon the tribesmen round Bamian, whose interests must lie quite as much with Herat as with Cabul."

The general nodded approvingly.

"I see that you have thought matters over well. If you will call here again in half an hour the letter for the moonshee shall be ready for you, and a thousand pounds in gold."

At the appointed time Angus called upon the general, and received the money and letter; then returning to his own tent, he rode out with Azim. When fairly away from the camp they dismounted and put on their Afghan disguises. They had brought an orderly with them, who took back the clothes they had discarded and Angus's sword to Macgregor's tent, he having undertaken to have them brought up to Cabul with his own baggage. They had no difficulty as to the way, as the path they had followed with Sadut had come down close to Gundamuck. They had little fear of being interfered with on the road. The Afghans would have gathered in the passes, and should they meet any they would only have to say that their village near Gundamuck had been burnt by the British, and they were now on their way to join Sadut and fight under his orders.

Although they saw several parties in the distance making their way towards the pass, they did not encounter any within speaking distance, and just at sunset reached Sadut's fort.

They had passed through the village unnoticed. Tribesmen were frequently coming and going, and there was nothing to distinguish them from others. They dismounted in front of the fort. A man was sitting at the top of a

ladder, and Angus held up his hand to him, and Hassan—for it was the man who had twice captured him—at once waved his hand in welcome, and stood up.

"You have come willingly this time," he said with a smile, as Angus reached him. "Of course you wish to see Sadut Khan. He is within. It is lucky that you have arrived to-day, for to-morrow he sets out."

Sadut greeted him with pleasure mingled with surprise.

"I did not expect to see you here, my friend."

"No, I suppose not, chief; but I am on a mission with which I am sure you will sympathize, and in which I hope you will aid me, so far as to spare me Hassan and his four men."

"What is its nature?" the chief asked. "I know that you would not come and offer me English money to abstain from fighting again."

"I should not think of such a thing, Sadut. I know that you are a fair and open enemy, and I think the better of you for fighting for your country. I may say that General Pollock has been informed of your kindness to me, and that you did your utmost to make Akbar keep his word to grant protection to the retiring army, and I can assure you that, in any event, no harm will happen to you or yours. I will tell you what I have come for. Do you know that all the hostages, ladies and children, have been sent away by Akbar from Cabul, that they are to be taken over the Bamian Pass to Khooloom, and handed over to the governor there, and that, doubtless, they will be sold as slaves to the Turkomans?"

"I had not heard it," Sadut said angrily. "It is a disgrace to us. They were delivered up trusting to our word and honour, and it is a foul deed of Akbar to harm them in any way after taking his oath for their protection. It is infamous! infamous!" and he walked up and down the

room in nerce indignation. "What should we say," he burst out, "if the families of Dost Mahomed and Akbar himself were to be sold by your people as slaves to some barbarous race? Could we complain if, when the news of this treatment of the hostages becomes known in India, Dost Mahomed's family should be treated in a similar way?" Then he stopped abruptly. "What is it that you have come to ask of me? The thing is done, and cannot be undone. Akbar and I are ill friends now, for I have bearded him in the council and denounced his conduct. Certainly I have no influence that could assist you. I am an Afghan, and am pledged to join the force that will oppose the march of your troops up the passes, and I am a man of my word. But even were I free to help you, I could be of little assistance. I have here not more than thirty or forty fighting men, and I doubt if even these would obey me on such an enterprise. I might ride to my own fort and summon the Momunds, whom I have so far kept quiet; but the enterprise would be a desperate one, we should set all the other tribes against us, and they would not risk destruction merely for the sake of rescuing a few white men and women. Their sympathies are all with the tribes round Cabul, and they share in their hatred of the infidel invaders. It would be as much as I could do to keep them quiet, and certainly I should fail if I called upon them to embark on such an enterprise."

"I have no intention of asking it of you, chief. I am going myself to see what can be done to save my friends, and have come to ask you to allow Hassan and his men to go with me. They are from Bamian, and at Bamian it is likely that the captives will be kept for some time. I should, of course, pay them well for their aid."

"You can take them," the chief said at once. "They are good men and faithful to me, and I rely upon them

as I could not do on any of my own tribesmen. I will call them in at once."

Hassan and his four men entered the room a minute later.

"Hassan," Sadut said, "you and your men have proved yourselves true and faithful followers from the day when you left your homes to carry me over the passes, although you all thought that there was no hope of our getting through. You have fought by my side in Kohistan; you twice at my orders carried off my friend here. He appreciates the service you did him, and is in sore need of five men upon whom he can rely to the utmost. He has come to ask me to let you go with him. A sore disgrace has fallen upon our nation. Akbar Khan has sent the men who placed themselves in his hands as hostages, and the women whom he swore to protect, over the Hindoo Koosh to be sold as slaves to the Usbegs. My word has been given to fight against the army of Gundamuck if it attempts to ascend the passes, and I at least will keep faith. This British officer is going to attempt to free some of the captives. How he will do so I know not, but my best wishes will go with him. He thinks it likely that the escort of the prisoners will halt for some little time at Bamian, and you more than any others might therefore be able to help. I do not order you to go, but I ask you to do so. It is a good work, and concerns the honour of every Afghan."

"And moreover," Angus said, "I will pay a thousand rupees to you, and five hundred to each of your followers. I will hand them over to you at once, and if we are successful I will pay you as much more."

The sum was a huge one in their eyes. It would suffice to settle them in comfort for the rest of their lives. Hassan looked at his men, and saw by the expression of their

faces that they were more than willing to accept the offer. He held out his hand to Angus, "We are your servants," he said, "and will serve you truly, and if needs be, lay down our lives for you, not only for the sake of the money you offer us, but because Sadut Khan has told us that for the honour of the nation these people ought to be released. We have been comrades in danger before, and were nigh dead when you rescued us when buried in the snow. I see not how this enterprise can be carried out; but we will do what you tell us, and men cannot do more. When do we start?"

"Every hour is of consequence," Angus replied. "Can you find your way across the mountains in the dark? if so, we will start at once."

"I certainly can find the way."

"You must all have a meal first," Sadut said. "Besides, you will need horses. They shall be brought in and got ready for you in an hour. See that the English officer's horses have a good feed, and that his servant eats with you. The food will be ready in half an hour."

No time was lost, and in an hour and a half after the arrival of Angus at the fort the party set out. Fortunately the moon was nearly full, and Hassan had so frequently gone down to Cabul from the fort that he had no difficulty whatever in following the track. This in many places was so steep that all had to dismount and lead their horses down. However, they reached Cabul an hour before sunrise, and all lay down in an empty hut for three or four hours' sleep.

Then Angus, with Hassan and three of his men, entered the town, leaving Azim and the other man to look after the horses. As there were numbers of tribesmen in the streets, they attracted no attention whatever. Proceeding

to the house of the moonshee, Angus enquired if Mohun Lal was in.

"He is busy. He does not grant audiences till ten o'clock."

Angus moved away and returned at half-past nine. Already five or six persons were waiting to see the moonshee, and by ten the number had considerably increased. It was eleven before Angus's turn arrived. The moonshee was alone. Angus took out his letter and handed it to him. He knew Mohun Lal well, having often taken communications to him from Burnes.

The Afghan read the letter, and looked up in surprise.

"You are well disguised indeed, sahib," he said, rising, "for, often as I have seen you before, I did not recognize you in the slightest, but thought it was, as usual, an Afghan peasant with complaints to make against plunderers. So you have undertaken the dangerous mission of endeavouring to rescue some of the prisoners. Truly you English have courage thus to thrust yourself into the midst of enemies, and on such a mission. However, I will do what I can to help you. I do not say that it is altogether hopeless, for I know my man; the commander of the escort is Saleh Mahomed. He is an adventurer, and has served under many masters. He was at one time a subaltern in one of your native regiments, but deserted with his men to Dost Mahomed just before the fight at Bamian. Such a man might be bought over, but not cheaply."

"General Pollock said he left the sum to be offered to him entirely to you."

Mohun Lal thought for some time, and then said:

"I should say that a pension of a thousand rupees a month, and a present of thirty thousand would tempt him as much as a larger sum. It would, I think, be best for

you to disguise yourself now as a Cashmerian. You know Syud Moorteza?"

"I know him well," Angus said; "he helped Captain Johnson to collect grain from the villages."

"It would be as well for you to use his name. As an Afghan, Saleh might doubt you. Altogether, it would be more likely that a man who may be considered a neutral should be employed on such a mission, and the offer to sell goods would make an opening. Of course you could take the dress you now wear with you in case of necessity. It would be too dangerous for me to give you a letter, for if Saleh, when you opened the subject to him, at once ordered you to be arrested, it would certainly be found on you, and would cost me my life. You will require to take a small escort with you, or you might be robbed at the first place you come to."

"I have five men with me," Angus replied. "They come from Bamian; one of them is a petty chief there, and might, if I find that Saleh cannot be approached, persuade or bribe some of the people there to aid."

"I fear you would not succeed in that way. Saleh had, I believe, two hundred and fifty men with him. I suppose you will start at once?"

"Our horses are outside the town, and we shall mount as soon as I return to them."

"I wish you good fortune. There are many Afghans who feel deeply the disgrace Akbar has brought upon himself, and upon all of us, by breaking his plighted word."

Taking leave of the moonshee, Angus joined his companions, and after having bought in the bazaar a costume suitable for a trader from Cashmere, and two bales of goods from that country, left the city.

CHAPTER XIX

THE BRITISH CAPTIVES

"WHY are you going as a Cashmerian?" Hassan asked. "I thought that you were going in the disguise that you now have on."

"I had intended to, Hassan; but Mohun Lal suggested that as a trader I should have more chance of going among the escort than as an Afghan, and I see that this would be so. And, moreover, as Afghans can enter into fellowship with the men of the escort better than I can, and as you come from Bamian, no doubt would arise as to the truth of your story, namely that, having been absent for more than two years from home, you were anxious to get home, and that as this trader had offered you money to serve as his escort it was a good opportunity for you to return."

Hassan nodded. "That makes a good story of it, certainly."

The change of disguise was made, two ponies were purchased to carry the bales of goods and provisions for the journey, and they then started. In buying his goods Angus had only purchased two costly shawls, which he intended as a present for Saleh, or, if he failed with him, for one of the officers under him. With this exception, the bales were filled with trifles such as might tempt the soldiers, and with stuffs which would, he was sure, be very welcome to the ladies, who must, naturally, be in a sore plight for garments, as what baggage they had started with must have been lost in the passes, and they could have had little opportunity of replenishing their wardrobe during their captivity.

They travelled rapidly, halting only for a few hours when

it was necessary to give their horses a rest. As the ladies were carried in litters, and there was no reason why they should be hurried on their journey, Angus knew that he must be gaining fast upon the captives and their escort, and indeed he reached Bamian only a few hours after them.

He put up at a little khan, while Hassan and his men went off to their village to see the families from whom they had been so long separated. Hassan found his wife in undisturbed possession of the little fort, and there was great joy in the village when it was found that he and his men had returned with funds that would enable them to pass the coming winter in comfort, and largely to increase their stock of animals. That evening two or three sheep were killed, and a general feast was held in honour of the return of the chief and his followers. As nothing was talked of in the little town but the arrival of the British captives, Angus had no difficulty in learning that these had been lodged in a little fort close to the place. He did not attempt to open his bales of goods, although several of the people came to him to ask him to do so, for so few traders had visited the place since the troubles began, that the stores had long been empty. There had, too, been a good deal of plundering since the British force there had retired. Angus was obliged to explain that he had only brought a few trifles with him, as his purpose was to buy Turkoman carpets and other goods at Khooloom, and that he had sold off almost all the stock he had brought from Cashmere at Cabul.

Leaving Azim at the khan to see that his goods were not stolen, he strolled out. The place was full of the men of the escort, who showed much discontent on finding that neither fruit nor any other of the little luxuries to which they were accustomed could be bought at Bamian. Angus had no difficulty in entering into conversation with some of

them. He had brought with him a considerable quantity of good tobacco, and when he produced a pouch and invited them to fill their pipes he at once won their good-will.

"How quickly have you come from Cabul? Was there any news when you left there?"

"We have travelled fast," he said. "You have had three days' start of us, and I arrived here this afternoon. No, there was no news. They say that the infidels are halting at Gundamuck. The chiefs are gathering in the passes with all their forces, but have not yet moved."

"I should have thought that they would have had enough of our passes; they will meet with the same fate as those who tried to go down them."

"It should be so," Angus replied. "Who can withstand your people when they are fighting among your own hills? You must have travelled slowly, since we gained three days upon you."

"We made very short journeys," the man said. "You see, we were encumbered with these women and children, for whom it must have been rough work, for the nights are already cold. I shall be glad when we get to Khooloom and hand them over to the governor there. But I will say for them that they have borne up bravely. I can tell you that we are all disgusted at having to be making this journey with them instead of taking our share of the spoil that will be gathered in the passes."

"Yes, it must be annoying to brave men to be thus wasting their time when great things are being done, to say nothing of losing their share of the booty to be gathered, Have you a good commander?"

"Yes, we have no cause to grumble on that account. Saleh Mahomed is a bold soldier and a cheerful fellow, is not unduly harsh, and as long as we keep our arms in good order, and obey his orders, he asks no questions when one

of us comes in with a sheep fastened to his saddle. But there has been no chance of getting anything to help out our rations, for the two or three little villages we have passed since we left the valley are for the most part deserted. There are women there, but the men have not yet come down from the hills with the flocks, and none of us have tasted meat since we started. Saleh Mahomed is a man who has travelled much and seen many things. He was an officer in the English army, but he would not fight against us, and two years ago, when Dost Mahomed with his army came here, he went over to him with his company of Sepoys. He was not a chief, but was a tribesman near the frontier. There are many of them, they say, in the service of the infidels; and he had done well for himself."

"I suppose the captive women must be in want of warm clothes. I have not a large stock of goods, but among them are several warm robes, which I would sell cheaply to them, for I wish to clear away my remaining stock, as I intend to buy Turkoman carpets at Khooloom and Balkh; and besides these I have some stuff which doubtless the women here would buy to make garments for the children. Think you that Saleh would let me traffic with them?"

"That I could not say; but if you have anything in your pack that would please him he might perhaps let you do so. You seem a good fellow, if you like I will take you to him to-morrow morning."

"Thank you for your offer. When I meet you I will have a pound of good tobacco, which I shall beg you to accept."

"I will be here. I shall be one of the guards to-night round the fort, but shall be free in the morning."

"Does Saleh Mahomed sleep there?"

"No, it is a miserable and dirty place. He lodges at the house of the headman there."

Early in the morning Hassan came down to the khan.

"Now, sahib, you have only to tell us what you want us to do, and you can rely upon us."

"For the present there is nothing. I am going to see Saleh Mahomed this morning, and try to get permission to sell some of my goods to the captives. I may then be able to learn something of his disposition towards them, and how he behaved to them during the journey. It is important that I should know this before giving him the message from the moonshee."

"It would be well to do so, master; but from what I hear the moonshee has been negotiating with many of the chiefs, who are willing enough to take his money, but who do not carry out their part of the bargain. However, I have not heard that any of them have denounced him. He is always considered to be the chief agent of the English, but as he spends English gold freely, and as it is well to have some one in Cabul through whom negotiations could be entered into with them, no one interferes with him."

"The only thing that you can do for the present is to go round among your friends, talk to them about the captives, and say that it is a disgrace that they should be sent as captives among the Usbegs after having received promises of protection, and having willingly submitted themselves as hostages. Of course you will do it carefully; but if you can create a feeling in their favour, and make them afterwards win over a portion of the escort, something might be done. Of course you can say, and truly, that Sadut Khan, Dost Mahomed's nephew by marriage, is most indignant at this breach of faith, and that you believe that many other chiefs share his feeling."

"I will set about it at once. The tribesmen here have not the same animosity against the English as those at Cabul. The English troops when they were here behaved well; they took no man's goods without payment, and the

tribesmen got better prices for their sheep and cattle than they had ever got before. They care little who rules at Cabul, and it is nothing to them whether it is the Barukzyes or a Dooranee."

The next morning Angus met the Afghan soldier. "Here is the tobacco I promised you; it is good stuff."

"If it is like that you gave me yesterday, I shall be very content. Now, come with me to Saleh; he is a good fellow if you find him in the humour." The officer was alone when they entered. "Saleh Mahomed," the soldier said, "this is a trader from Cashmere, Syud Moorteza; he will tell you his business. He seems to be a good fellow, and has some excellent tobacco."

Having thus introduced Angus he left the room.

"What is it that you want with me?" Saleh asked in Persian. Angus replied in the same language, "I am a trader, my lord, and wish to get rid of some of the wares I am carrying. They are but few, as I am going north to purchase and not to sell. I would willingly rid myself of a part of them. Among them are warm dresses and stuffs. I am told that the persons in your charge are but thinly clad, and I doubt not that they would willingly buy these goods of me."

The Afghan laughed. "They would willingly have them, no doubt; but as to buying, they are altogether without money. Those who were in charge of them saw to that before they were handed over to me."

"I should not mind that, my lord. I have had dealings with Englishmen who have come up to Cashmere, and they generally take a store of shawls and other things back with them to India. We always find that they are true to their word, and we take their orders as willingly as gold—more so, indeed, because the shroffs in India take them anywhere, and it saves our having to send money there for the pur-

chase of goods in India. Thus, then, if they gave me orders on their people at Calcutta or Bombay, I would more willingly accept them than gold, which is a dangerous commodity to carry."

"But you say that you are going to purchase goods."

"That is so, my lord, but I do not carry money to do so. I pay for them with orders upon a merchant at Herat to whom I am well-known, and who acts as my agent, and buys for me such goods as I require from Persia. I have not come empty-handed to you, my lord. It is right that if you do me the favour of allowing me to trade with your prisoners, you should share in the benefit. I have with me here a cashmere shawl. I do not say that it is worthy of your acceptance, but it is handsome and of the best wool, and will make a warm girdle."

Saleh was fond of finery. "Let me look at it," he said.

Angus undid the parcel and held the shawl up, and closely watched the Afghan as he examined it. He saw that he was pleased with it. However, the chief said, "I say not that it is not a good shawl, but it is not of the best quality. I have been at Srinagar."

"'Tis not of the best, my lord—I would not try to deceive one like yourself—but it is the best I have, and I can hardly hope to make more than its value from these people."

"It is worth about two hundred rupees," Saleh said.

"Your lordship is not to be deceived, that is the very sum I gave for it; but it is worth much more here."

"You seem to be an honest man," Saleh said, throwing the shawl down on the divan from which he had risen. "And in truth I should be well content that the prisoners were better supplied with garments in the cold weather that is setting in. I am ordered to conduct them safely to Khooloom, but nought was said against my providing them with such comforts on the way as they could obtain. To-day I

am busy; I have to see that the men are well quartered and fed. To-morrow if you come here with your goods I will myself take you to the place where they are confined; but mind that no word is said to them save concerning your merchandise."

"What words should I say, my lord? But doubtless one of your men will be present and see that I confine myself to my business."

"Then come at this hour to-morrow."

Angus bowed deeply and then left, delighted that he had obtained permission to see the captives.

That day the prisoners were taken to another fort, Saleh being moved by their complaints of the dirt and want of accommodation in the little fort in which they were crowded. The place was but a little better than the one they had left, but there was somewhat more room.

Hassan came to Angus in the evening. "I have seen many of my friends," he said, "and have spoken as you told me. They are indignant. I told them that Dost Mahomed and his family, and that of Akbar, are honourably treated in India, and are allowed a large income by the government there, and live with every comfort and luxury, and it is a disgrace to our nation that such treatment should be meted out to the officers who are hostages, and the ladies and their families. I do not say that they will be disposed to hazard their own safety by taking any active measures, but if the soldiers were to show any disposition favourable to the captives, they would assuredly take no hostile steps against them."

"I have strong hopes that I may succeed with Saleh. He has taken a bribe from me to permit me to sell goods to the prisoners, and he may be willing to take a vastly greater one to release them."

"My men have been going about among the soldiers, sahib.

They are discontented at this journey they have taken, and at the prospect of a still farther one, and if their commander gave them the order to return, they would not, I think, hesitate to obey."

"Let your men continue at that work, but let them be careful not to appear to be too warmly interested. Let them avoid at present all mention of captives, and simply inflame the men's minds by talking of the hardships of their being sent on such a journey when so much booty is likely to be picked up in the passes. It is not likely that if Saleh orders them to proceed on their journey they will refuse to do so, but if he learns from his officers that the men would gladly obey him if he ordered them to return, it may help him to decide to accept the offer I have to make him. I shall put off doing so till the last moment, because at any time news may come that Pollock and Nott are both beating back all opposition and advancing on Cabul, and in that case he may see that his interest lies in siding with them rather than with Akbar."

In the morning Angus rode with Saleh to the fort, Azim following with the pony carrying the bales of goods. Two men stood as sentries on the platform on the top of the plain, half a dozen others were posted round it. The officer in charge came out.

"Have you anything to report, Suleiman?"

"No, captain, except that the prisoners complain that this place is little better than the last they were confined in."

"They are particular, these ladies and gentlemen," Saleh said with a laugh. "The place might be better, no doubt, but they will be lucky if they do not find themselves very much worse lodged when they get among the Usbegs."

"Major Pottinger was asking, captain, that a few blankets should be given them for the use of the women and children."

"We will see about it. However, this trader here has some warm robes to sell, and they may just as well pay for the things themselves as that I should put my hand into my pocket, for my instructions said nothing about buying things of this sort for them; and from the manner in which Prince Akbar gave me my orders, I should say that the more they suffered the better he would be pleased. However, I am sorry for them, and have given permission to this Cashmerian to see them and try to sell his goods to them."

The officer looked doubtful. "I do not think there is a rupee among them."

"No, but the trader has faith that if they give him notes for his goods, their people will assuredly cash them."

"He must be a very confiding fellow," the officer said.

"No; by what he says the shroffs of all the large cities in India are always ready to take the notes of English officers, and that he himself has done so in Cashmere.

"At any rate you can take him up to their apartments, but remain in the room while he bargains with them. I do not mind his carrying on his trade, but see that he in no way communicates with them save in the matter of his business."

Saleh went up with Angus, followed by the officer and Azim, who was assisted by the soldiers to carry up the goods. A sentry was sitting before the door at the top of the stairs with his musket across his knee. As Saleh came up, he rose and took a key hanging on a nail on the wall beside him and opened the door.

"I hear that you are still not content with your lodging, Captain Johnson," Saleh said as he entered. "Well, what would you have? These towers are all alike, and do not come up to our ideas of comfort in Cabul; and as glass is scarcely known in Bamian, no doubt you feel it cold at night."



ANGUS SHOWS HIS GOODS TO THE PRISONERS.



"If we had a few blankets to hang across the windows the ladies would not feel it so much, Saleh."

"That is so; and as I am anxious that they should not, while under my charge, feel greater discomfort than necessary, I have permitted this trader, Syud Moorteza, to enter. He has, he tells me, some warm robes and other things which he is ready to sell, and as I told him that before you came into my charge all your money had been taken away, he is ready to take your notes upon a banker at Calcutta or Bombay in payment."

Captain Johnson knew the Cashmerian, as he had rendered invaluable assistance in obtaining grain. Angus, who was acquainted with him, had the more willingly adopted his name because the man was about his own height and build, and there was even some resemblance in feature. Captain Johnson therefore looked with interest at the trader, who was standing a little behind Saleh. For a moment he seemed puzzled but Angus had his hand on his chin and suddenly moved two fingers across his lips and very slightly shook his head. Johnson understood the gesture, and replied to Saleh: "The man is right; he may be sure that whatever happens to us our friends will see that he is paid for any goods we may buy of him. We will write a letter in Persian, which you can read to our friends, saying that this man has trusted us and that our orders are to be honoured."

The ladies, who were in the next room, were called in. The Afghan commander, who had nothing to do, remained with his officer, being interested in the contents of the trader's bales. Azim opened them, and spread the articles out on the floor for inspection. Angus was greatly concerned at the appearance of the ladies, to all of whom he was known. His disguise, however, had so completely changed his appearance that none of them recognized him.

His face was darkened, his eyebrows and hair had been stained black, and by the assistance of some false hair the latter was arranged in the fashion worn by the man he represented. Syud Moorteza was of the Hindoo religion, and Angus had imitated his caste marks on the forehead, which alone greatly altered his appearance. But the ladies scarcely looked at him. Their delight at seeing the warm robes and woollen cloths was great indeed. Here was a prospect that their sufferings from cold would be alleviated, and that their children could now be warmly clad.

Among the smaller articles in his bale Angus included a good supply of needles and thread, buttons, and other small necessaries. The ladies saw at once that from the soft woolen cloths they would be able to make an abundance of warm clothing for the children. Angus expatiated after the manner of a trader on the quality of his goods. Holding up a warm robe to Captain Johnson, he said: "This would suit you, my lord; it will keep you warm in the coldest night."

"You have not more than enough for the ladies," Captain Johnson said. "If there is anything over after they have made their purchases, we shall be glad to take the rest of your cloth. We can wind it round us."

"But feel the quality of this robe, my lord," Angus urged, with a wink that was understood by the officer, who at once took hold of it. As he did so Angus slipped a note, which he had folded to the smallest possible dimensions, into his hands.

"Yes, it is good material," he said quietly; "but, as I have just said, these must be for the ladies." And he turned away as if unwilling to be tempted, and presently sauntered into the next room. In order to keep up his character Angus asked fully five times the proper value for his goods. But the captives had no thought of bargain-

ing; for these goods would be of the greatest comfort to themselves and their children, as coverings for the night, and as wraps during the passage of the passes, for in addition to the clothes and cloth, there were silk mufflers for the neck, and warm jackets lined with astrakhan fur. Nor were the needles and thread less prized. Their clothes and those of the children were in rags, and they would be most useful for mending, as well as the making of new clothes. Some of them almost cried with joy at the thought of the comfort that this would be to their little ones.

In a few minutes the greater portion of the contents of the bales was disposed of. "The best way," Pottinger said, "will be for Lawrence, Mackenzie, and myself, as the three political officers, to give this man an order signed by the three of us on our agent at Calcutta, and I will write an open letter to accompany it, authorizing any British officer or banker to cash the note when it is presented, and to send it on to my agent. The man has done us an inestimable service, and it will facilitate his getting the money. Where are you thinking of cashing this?" he asked.

"At Herat."

"Then I will also give you a note to a trader there. He has a shop in the great bazaar, and is a friend of mine. He has relations with business men in India, and will, I am sure, cash it for you at once should you desire cash, or will furnish you in exchange with bills on some merchant in Candahar." He then mentioned the trader's name.

"That will suit me well," Angus said. "I know the man by name, having been myself at Herat. He is of good repute, and I am sure that he or any other merchant having dealings in India would gladly cash the order, as it would be far safer to send than money."

It was not until the purchases had all been made that Captain Johnson re-entered the room, came and stood by

Angus, asking a few questions as to the goods; when the two Afghans were looking another way he passed a note into the pretended merchant's hand. Presently he said: "But we have no pen and ink to write this order?"

"I have them, sahib," Angus said, taking an ink-bottle and pen, such as were always carried by traders, from his pocket, together with several sheets of paper. The price of all the goods was added up; then Pottinger wrote an order for the amount, which was signed by himself, Lawrence, and Mackenzie. Then Johnson took Pottinger aside as if to discuss the terms of the letters.

"That man is not Syud Moorteza at all," he said. "Don't turn round and look at him. He has given me a note, and I am answering it. Who do you think it is?"

'I have been a little puzzled, not by his face, but by his voice. I have it now—it is Angus Campbell."

"You have guessed right. He has come up by himself through the passes to try and overtake us. He bears a message from Mohun Lal to Saleh, saying that he shall be given a pension of a thousand rupees a month and a present of thirty thousand if he will hand over the captives to the British general when he reaches Cabul. He has asked my opinion as to whether it would be safe to make the proposition to the man, or whether he had better wait until news comes that Pollock has defeated Akbar in the passes. I have told him that I have already sounded Saleh, and that though he passed the matter off, I believe he is open to take a bribe if he hears that Nott and Pollock are making their way up. He says that if bad news comes—and I think it would then be useless to approach Saleh—he will make an attempt with some men he has with him to effect your escape, and also mine, and that of Mackenzie and Lawrence. Boyd, of course, would not leave his wife and

family, and it would be impossible to take the women and children with us."

"Campbell is a splendid fellow!" Pottinger said. "He behaved wonderfully well at Herat, and I was sure that in time he would make a very fine officer. It is a noble thing, his undertaking such a tremendous risk."

The letters were now written and handed to Angus. Saleh, however, took them from his hands and read them, and then handed them back, after assuring himself that there was nothing written but what had been agreed upon. Then he and the officer went downstairs with Angus and Azim, the latter carrying easily enough the one small bale that sufficed for the goods unsold.

"You have made a nice sum out of this," Saleh said.

"I have had a long journey with my goods," Angus replied humbly; "but they were well contented, and paid without bargaining the prices I asked. I feel, my lord, that I am greatly indebted to you for the opportunity. I have not money with me—we traders never carry cash, and I shall have to wait many months before I receive the price of the goods—nevertheless, my lord, I will willingly give you in token of my gratitude another shawl equal to the last; I have brought with me only two. And you can select any goods you like from those remaining. There are many silk things among them, for they only bought such as were needed for wear."

Saleh was well satisfied, and telling Angus that he might call round in the evening with some of the silk embroidered scarfs, he allowed him to return to the camp. Two days passed, and then a horseman rode in with the news that Akbar had been defeated at Tezeen, but would fight another battle, and, as he was being joined by many chiefs, would doubtless overthrow the infidels. The news spread

rapidly and caused much excitement in the camp, which was heightened by the fact that the man said that there was a report that Ghuznee had been captured by the British force that was marching from Candahar.

Angus went in the evening and requested a private interview with Saleh. As Johnson had told him in his note, the Afghan had already been revolving in his mind whether he could not do better for himself by halting at Bamian until he knew how affairs would turn out at Cabul. Johnson, who had become very intimate with him on the journey, had said casually that the British government would assuredly pay a large sum for the return of the captives. He had taken no notice of the remark at the time, but had thought a good deal of it. He knew that money had been lavishly spent among the chiefs, and it seemed to him that he too might have a share in the golden flood.

He was a shrewd man as well as an unscrupulous one. He had three times before deserted his employers when better offers had been made to him, and it seemed to him that he had it now in his power to procure a sum that would make him rich for life. He had been told by his sub-officers that there was a growing disaffection among the men, that many of them openly grumbled at the prospect of the journey to Khobloom, and that some of the Bamian petty chiefs had been going among them, and, they believed, stirring up a feeling against the journey. He had from the first entertained some suspicion of this Cashmerian trader. Why should he not have bought a larger store of Indian goods to exchange with the Turkomans?

His doubt as to the best course to pursue had been heightened at the news that he had received that afternoon. What would happen if the British again settled down at Cabul? They would doubtless send a force to endeavour to rescue the captives. And although he might be at Khoo-

loom before they did so, his situation would then be a most unpleasant one. Akbar, as a fugitive, could no longer pay him and his troops; they would, of course, leave him, and he would not dare to return to Cabul. He was thinking over these matters when Angus was ushered in. The latter had already decided that he would for the present maintain the character that he had assumed. If Saleh knew that he was a British officer he would assuredly, if he remained faithful to his charge, arrest him also; but as merely the agent of Mohun Lal, one of the most influential men in Cabul, the Afghan would probably allow him to depart unharmed, even if he refused the offered bribe.

"I have not come to you this evening to talk of merchandise, Saleh Mahomed," Angus began. "I have come upon a more important matter. As you know, the troops from Jellalabad have defeated Akbar, and are making their way up through the passes. They will defeat him again if he fights them. The troops from Candahar have reached Ghuznee, and assuredly there is no force that can arrest their progress to Cabul. I have only waited for this to speak openly to you. I am sent here by Mohun Lal. He authorizes me to promise you, in his name and that of General Pollock, a pension of a thousand rupees a month, and a gift of thirty thousand rupees, if you will hold the prisoners here until a British force arrives to carry them back to Cabul."

The Afghan showed no surprise. "I suspected," he said, "all along that you had come here for some other motive than trade. What guarantee does Mohun Lal offer that these terms shall be fulfilled?"

"It would not have been safe for him to have entrusted such a message to paper," Angus said, "but he gives you his word."

"Words are no guarantee," Saleh said, "especially the word of a chief."

"I would suggest, Saleh Mahomed, that you have it in your power to obtain a guarantee that even you will acknowledge to be a binding one. You have in your hands three men whose names are known throughout Afghanistan and through India as those of men of honour. You have Major Pottinger, Captain Lawrence, and Mr. Mackenzie, all men whose word would be accepted unhesitatingly to whatever promise they might make. They and the other officers would, I am sure, give you a written guarantee that the offer made by Mohun Lal shall be confirmed and carried out by the government of India."

"What should I do with money without employment?"

"If you desire employment, I have no doubt that you would be granted, in addition to the money payment, the command of a native regiment raised among the Pathans of the lower hills."

"I will think the matter over," the Afghan said, and with a wave of the hand dismissed Angus. But the latter had seen, by the expression of Saleh's face when he mentioned the terms, that these were far higher than he had himself ever thought of, and he had no doubt whatever that they would be accepted. The first thing in the morning he received a message from Saleh Mahomed requesting him to accompany him to the tower. The Afghan, beyond the usual salute, was silent during the ride. On dismounting Saleh told him to follow him. On entering the prisoners' apartments the officer said: "You are aware that Prince Akbar's orders are that I am to take you to Khooloom. I had certainly intended to do so, but I have received news that leads me to doubt whether he may be in a position to support you if I carry out the orders. Yesterday afternoon I heard that he had been defeated at Tezeen. He will fight again with a stronger force than before, still the issue is doubtful. I may tell you that the messenger also

brought to the fort news that the force from Candahar had taken Ghuznee."

An exclamation of joy broke from the prisoners.

"Another thing has happened," the Afghan went on. "This trader last night informed me that he really came here on a mission from Mohun Lal. He promises me, in General Pollock's name, that if I release you and carry you to Cabul I shall be granted a pension of a thousand rupees a month and thirty thousand as a present. I know nothing of General Pollock, and have no great faith in Mohun Lal, but seeing that Akbar may be even now a fugitive and your two armies in Cabul, if you gentlemen will swear by your God to make good to me what Syud Moorteza states he is authorized to offer, I will hand you over to your own people."

The offer was joyfully accepted. Angus was requested by Saleh to draw out a bond to that effect in Persian, and this was signed by Pottinger, Lawrence, Johnson, and Mackenzie. Another agreement was then drawn up by Johnson, by which all the officers bound themselves to pay as many months' pay and allowances, in accordance with their rank, as should be necessary to carry out the terms of the agreement, thus satisfying Saleh that, should the English general refuse to ratify the first agreement, he would receive the money from them. To this all the prisoners and the ladies signed their names, Brigadier Shelton heading the list; while Lady Macnaghten and Mrs. Sturt, who were widows, bound themselves in a codicil to pay such sums as might be demanded from them by Major Pottinger and Captains Lawrence and Johnson.

"You are no longer my prisoner, sahibs," Saleh said when the two documents were handed to him, and he on his part had given a bond to perform his share of the conditions. "Now, I should like your counsel as to how I had best pro-

ceed. I believe that my men will gladly obey me in this matter, because they are discontented at being sent so far away, and I feel sure that a very slight inducement on your part to them will settle the matter. If I could offer them in your name a gratuity of four months' pay when we arrive at Cabul, it would settle matters."

To this the officers willingly agreed.

"I have been thinking over the affair all night," he went on. "Which, think you, would be best—to travel straight for Cabul when you hear that the British have arrived there, or to wait here? I hear that many of the petty chiefs in the neighbourhood are indignant that Akbar Khan should have broken all the promises he made, and have treated so badly those who placed themselves under his protection, while at the same time his father, together with his own family, are receiving most honourable treatment in India. Doubtless you would rather go straight down to Cabul, but we must remember that if defeated, Akbar with a very large number of his followers may again fly by this route and make for Khooloom, as he and Dost Mahomed did when the British first marched to Cabul. Should they meet us on our way down they would assuredly attack us, and their numbers might be so great that we should be overwhelmed. On the other hand, if we stay here we can occupy the largest of these little forts and set to work to strengthen it, and might then resist any force Akbar could bring against us until the British troops arrive to our assistance."

The officers were silent for a minute, and then Pottinger said: "What do you think, Brigadier? This is a military matter."

"I should say the last proposition is the safest," Shelton replied. "We may be sure that the moment Pollock reaches Cabul he will send off a body of cavalry to rescue us. Akbar

would have at best only forty-eight hours' start, perhaps not half that, and he would scarcely venture to stop here to undertake a siege. He will certainly have no guns with him, and the three hundred men of our escort, with ten or twelve of us to lead them, could be trusted to withstand any hurried assault he might make upon us."

The others all agreed that this would be the safest plan.

"Very well," Saleh said. "I will go now and harangue my men, and in the meantime you can prepare to move. I will select the largest and most defensible of these forts. We will move quietly in there, and then I will summon the Bamian chiefs, and proclaim that I have abandoned the cause of Akbar, and now with my British allies summon them to invite their men to join me, so that when an English force arrives here they will be free from all molestation, and will receive presents in accordance with the number of men they furnish."

So saying he left the room, and the joy of the captives broke out in general congratulations among the men, and tears of joy from the women. Pottinger, Johnson, and Boyd gathered round Angus and poured forth their thanks to him. Nothing had hitherto been said to the ladies as to the real character of the supposed trader, for it was felt that if this enterprise failed the disappointment would to them be terrible. As soon as they learned who he was and what he had done, they too crowded round, and Angus was for a time quite confused with the expressions of gratitude showered upon him.

"I see," Pottinger said, when the din of voices had quieted down, "that you have not informed Saleh Mahomed of your real character."

"I thought it better not to do so. I really came from Mohun Lal, and if he thought I had not done so, he might have doubted whether I had any authority to make such a

proposal; therefore, I thought it would be well to keep up my present character to the end."

"Perhaps it is best so," Pottinger agreed. "These Afghans are always suspicious, and a man who has several times betrayed his employers would be more suspicious than other people. I quite agree with you that it is best you should keep up your present character. I suppose Mohun Lal really did give you the assurance about the ransom?"

"Yes, General Pollock told me that he would give any sum Mohun Lal might think it desirable to offer, and that was the figure fixed upon as being high enough to tempt Saleh, and yet not excessive for such a service. Besides, he thought that he might ask more, in which case I should of course have bargained with him."

"It is a sum that would tempt any Afghan chief," Pottinger said, "and to a mere military adventurer like Saleh would appear prodigious. Well, we will hear of your adventures afterwards. He may return at any moment, and it might put him out of humour if he found that we were not ready. Not, indeed, that there is much to do. Even the ladies will be able to pack up their scanty belongings in a few minutes. There would, in fact, be nothing at all to pack had it not been for the things they bought of you. The next room is all in confusion, for every one of them is hard at work making clothes for the children."

It was half an hour before Saleh Mahomed returned.

"All is well," he said; "the men did not hesitate for a moment. They are delighted at the prospect of returning to Cabul, and declare they will fight till the last if they are attacked. I set them to work at once to clear out the largest of the forts here. The chief, when I told him what it was required for, refused his consent, so I at once turned him out, and have appointed another favourable to us in his place. We will move there at once."

The news infused fresh strength into the ladies, several of whom were suffering from sickness, and all from long-continued anxiety and the hardships of the journey; they were able to proceed on foot to the fort. Hassan was the first to come in with ten followers to give in his adherence to the new order of things. Many others followed the example; and as Angus was able to supply money, strong parties were soon at work throwing up entrenchments round the tower. Pottinger, convinced that audacity was the best policy, at once issued a proclamation calling upon the people of the town and the chiefs of all the surrounding villages to come in at once and pay their respects, and it was not long before they began to arrive.

The next day still larger numbers were set to work, and by evening the earthworks were so advanced that they were in a position to offer a very strong resistance. Late that evening a friendly chief brought in the news that General Pollock was within a day's march of Cabul, that all resistance had ceased, and that Akbar had fled no one knew whither.

It was immediately decided that a start should be made for Cabul on the following morning. It was evident that Akbar had not retired by that route—had he done so he would have arrived before the news of his flight—and that therefore the risk of meeting any strong force on the road was very slight. They set out at eight o'clock in the morning. Horses had been procured for the whole party; the officers took the children before them, the ladies rode. That night all slept on the rocks within shelter, but at midnight they were awakened by the arrival of a horseman. He brought a letter from Sir Richmond Shakespere, General Pollock's military secretary, saying that he was on the point of starting with six hundred native horse for Bamian.

At daybreak the party were astir again, pressing their

horses eagerly, their sufferings all forgotten in the hope of speedily meeting their friends. At noon a cloud of dust was seen to rise from the road far ahead; then some straggling horsemen were made out, and behind them a body of cavalry. It was still possible that this might be a body of the enemy, and preparations were at once made for defence. The drums were beat, a line formed, and muskets loaded. Soon, however, it could be made out that an officer riding at the head of the party was in British uniform, and in a few minutes Shakespere rode up, followed by his men. The joy of the meeting was almost beyond words. A few days before a hopeless captivity among wild tribesmen seemed to be their certain lot; now they were among friends again. They learned from Sir Richmond that General Sale himself was to set out at the head of a brigade to support the advanced party.

The next morning they started again, and on the 20th met Sale's column. That evening they passed near the camp of the Candahar force, and the next day rode through Cabul on their way to Pollock's camp, where their arrival excited unbounded delight, for it had generally been felt that the victories that they had won would be incomplete indeed unless their fellow countrymen and women had been rescued. General Pollock thanked Angus publicly that evening for the service that he had rendered, and the manner in which he had carried out the perilous scheme he had volunteered to perform, and he received innumerable congratulations from all the officers with whom he had shared in the defence of Jellalabad.

The army remained but a few days at Cabul, for the winter was at hand. It was at first proposed to destroy the Bala Hissar, but the idea was given up, as it was represented that no ruler of Afghanistan would be able to maintain his position unless he had that fortress to rely upon. Instead of this the great bazaar, through which Macnaghten's body had

been carried in triumph, was destroyed, and in spite of the efforts of their officers many of the troops entered the city and punished the treachery of its inhabitants by sacking a considerable portion of it. The united army then marched down the passes and retired to India. Pollock's division met with no resistance whatever; that of Nott, which followed it, was more than once attacked by large bands of plunderers.

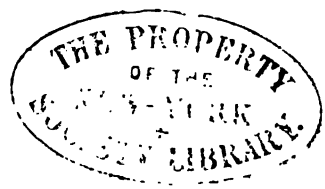
The report that General Pollock had sent in to the Governor-general on the day the captives reached the camp gave full credit to Angus for the courage and devotion that he had shown, and stated that had he not succeeded in bringing Saleh Mahomed over to our side, the latter would probably have reached Khooloom with the captives before they could have been overtaken, and in that case they might have been sent far away on the approach of Sale's brigade and been lost for ever to their friends. The consequence was that he was at once appointed political officer to one of the Rajput states.

Henceforth his promotion was rapid. Six years later he went to England on three years' leave. On the ship on which he sailed were four officers of his acquaintance, some of whom were accompanied by their wives. From several of these he received the most pressing invitations to stay with them at their country houses. These he gladly accepted, for except among military men who had returned home, he was without friends. Feeling at a loss for employment after a life of such activity as he had led, he threw up his leave at the end of the year, and took back with him to India a wife, the daughter of a colonel who had sailed with him from India.

At the end of another ten years he returned home for good. His pay had been large. He had laid by a considerable sum before he first went home, and this he had placed in the hands

of the firm to whom he had sent his money before leaving Teheran for Herat. It had been well employed by them, and at the age of forty he returned home with a considerable fortune, besides a pension, after twenty-three years of service. He had been reluctant to quit his work, but his wife's health had suffered from the climate. His three children had been sent home to her family, and he now bought a place near her people. At first he felt altogether out of his element, but he gradually fell into the ways of country life, and no longer regretted that his work in India had come to an end.

THE END.



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